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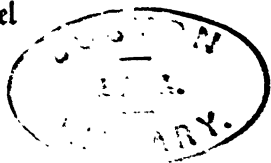
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A Novel



By JAMES PAYN

AUTHOR OF

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THICKER THAN WATER.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. BECKETT.

It is two o'clock in the July afternoon, and on what the majority of Londoners, in spite of Geronimo's opinion to the contrary, consider the pleasantest day in the week, because it is a half-holiday. Geronimo's objection to Saturday was founded, the poet tells us, on the prolonged wear of his shirt; but to the city toiler that is a small objection; indeed, the greatest of all Londoners, and one who worked the hardest (though not, it is true, unless he was obliged), has left it on record, through his biographer, that he did not like clean linen.

Hyde Park is crowded with pleasure-seekers, but the Row is empty. The Upper Ten Thousand have gone home to lunch, the Over Two Millions have just dined. Beside the mile-long garden that extends from the Marble Arch to Apsley House the "swart mechanic" lounges, pipe in mouth, admiringly; he gazes at the glowing parterres of wondrous shape and hue, and wonders how "them color beds" are made, and (especially) who pays for them. He thinks how his missis and the kids would enjoy the spectacle, and is half inclined to fetch them; but upon reflection, and finding his mouth a little dry, considers the morrow better adapted for their recreation, and crossing to the other side of the road, drops into the public-house in the mews. As he does so he bestows, perhaps, a glance at the stately pile at its corner, and expresses an opinion,

mingled with tobacco-juice, that "the cove as lives there must have a sight of money"—in which he is quite correct.

Of all the mansions in Park Lane, albeit there are some, though not many, larger, Beckett House gives the strongest impression to the passer-by not only of wealth, but, what is a very different thing (and much better), the possession of an abundance of ready money. Just as on illumination nights we see the lines of some public edifice picked out with fire, so all the summer long the balconies of Beckett House show, tier on tier, their glowing lines of flowers. Under the large portico there is a miniature jungle of tropical foliage, and when at night the opened door gives a glimpse of the interior to the passing Peri, it seems to her an Eden indeed.

Nor even in winter does this shrine of Flora lack its gifts, for in the centre and on either wing are great conservatories, to which "the time of roses" is but a poetic figment, and May (for once) is happy in December's arms.

Mrs. Beckett, the owner of this palace, has a passion for flowers, which her wealth enables her to indulge to the full; nor is this the only proof of her good taste. She had once a handle to her name, but laid it aside by an act of voluntary abnegation. Emperors and others have done the like before her, but a woman—never. Her first husband was Sir Robert Orr, a City knight, who left her an immense jointure and her "ladyship." He had never been remarkable for personal beauty, and unless in the sense of years—he was three times her age—could hardly have been called accomplished. It was a marriage of convenience; but the old man had been kind to her in life and death, and she respected his memory. When she married her second husband, John Beckett, the railway engineer, she dropped her "ladyship;" Sir Robert had been intensely proud of the title, and she felt that it belonged to him. The law, of course, would have decided as much, but she might have retained it by courtesy. She was not a woman to parade her sentiments, and, having some sense of humor, was wont to account for this act of self-sacrifice upon moral grounds; she did not think it respectable, she said, to figure with her husband in the *Morning Post* as

Mr. Beckett and Lady Orr ; she left that suspicious anomaly for the wives of bishops.

John Beckett had been a rich man, though he could not have measured purses with Sir Robert, and he had ten times his wits. He had not wasted them much on building bridges or hollowing tunnels out of the "too solid earth ;" he left such enduring monuments to scientific theorists, and applied the great powers of his mind—he called them, without the faintest consciousness of self-satire, its "grasp"—to contracts : mostly in connection with coal. He took the same practical view of matrimony, which poor Lady Orr had never guessed, and for her part had wedded her second husband for love. It was unintelligible to her that a man of so much wealth should pant for more ; but he did so to his last breath. If he could have carried all his money (and hers) away with him—"to melt," or "to begin the next world with"—he would have done it, and left her penniless. As it was, he died suddenly—killed by a fall from his horse below her very windows—and intestate. Even when his scarce breathing body was lying in an up-stairs chamber, and she tending it with all wifely solicitude, she could not stifle a sense of coming enfranchisement after twenty-five years of slavery, or the consciousness that her Sir Robert had been the better man of the two.

A woman of experience, at least, if not of wisdom, was the present mistress of Beckett House ; with strong passions, but with a not ungenerous heart ; outspoken, from the knowledge of her "great possessions," perhaps, as much as from natural frankness ; a warm friend and not a very bitter enemy ; and at the bottom of it all with a certain simplicity of character, of which her love for flowers was an example. She had loved them as Kitty Conway, the country doctor's daughter, when violets instead of camellias had been "her only wear," sweet-peas and wallflowers the choicest ornaments of her little garden, and Park Lane, to her unsophisticated mind, like other lanes. "Fat, fair, and forty" she was wont to call herself at the date this story opens, and it was the truth ; but not the whole truth. Fat she was and fair she was, but she was within a few years of fifty. Of course, she was ad-

mirably preserved. As the kings of old took infinite pains that their bodies after death should not decay, so women do their best for themselves in that way while still in the flesh ; and Mrs. Beckett was as youthful as art and care could make her. In shadow and with the light behind her, persons of the other sex might have set her down as even less mature than she described herself to be. There would have been at least ten years' difference between their "quotations"—as poor Sir Robert would have called them—and that of her tiring-maid.

Five years she had had of gilded ease and freedom since drunken, greedy, hard John Beckett had occupied his marble hall in Kensal Green—Sir Robert had a similar edifice of his own in Highgate cemetery, for she had too much good taste to mix their dust—and on the whole she had enjoyed them. Far too well favored by fortune, however, not to have her detractors, she was whispered by some to be by no means averse to a third experiment in matrimony. "There swam no goose so gray," they were wont to quote, and "There was luck in odd numbers." Gossips will say anything, and men delight in jokes against the fair sex. There is one about matrimony which was applied to the present case. A student of human nature once inquired of his grandmother (ætat. 80) at what age females ceased to experience the tender passion. "My dear boy," she answered, rather tartly, "you must ask somebody much older than I am." There was even a rumor, not old enough to be a legend, that Mrs. Beckett had once sounded her confidential man of business, Mr. Rennie, upon this subject. "As you consult me as a friend," he said—by which he meant gratuitously—"my opinion, my dear madam, is not worth much ; but as to the re-marriage of widows—in cases where they have £30,000 a year at their own disposal—I think it risky."

Mrs. Beckett sighed, for she remembered that even when she was but twenty she had been married for her money. Still, every man was not like John Beckett ; and how nice Sir Robert must have been when he was young !

On the day on which our story opens the widow was sitting in her drawing-room, with a novel in her hand, on which, however, she was not bestowing that close regard,

I do not say which such an agreeable description of literature has a right to exact, but even the commonest attention ; her glance wandered with ill-concealed impatience over the top of her book to the gorgeous timepiece on the mantelpiece, the hands of which were travelling over gold and china towards two o'clock.

Suddenly her fair face flushed crimson ; her eyes had met with another pair bound on the same identical errand ; Miss Marvon, her young friend and "companion," was also watching the clock.

"Do you want your lunch, Mary?" inquired the lady of the house, with a very good imitation of a yawn.

"Not at all, thank you, Mrs. Beckett," was the quiet reply, delivered in the gentlest and sweetest of tones. It was not her dependent position that gave honey to her speech ; it was natural to Mary Marvon to be sweet and gentle to everybody, but especially to those who were kind to her ; and Mrs. Beckett had been very kind. The jewels on the girl's shapely wrist, the lace about her dainty neck, the very dress which fitted her slight but graceful figure with such completeness, were all Mrs. Beckett's gifts. Nay, in her dark brown hair blushed a scarlet flower, which Mrs. Beckett, in her characteristic admiration for it, had placed there with her own hands that morning, as being the fittest setting for such a floral jewel. If anything were wanting to show how smooth and even was the social ground on which the two women stood, notwithstanding the conventional relation between them, it was found in the next words that Mrs. Beckett spoke. As a rule ladies do not think it worth while to excuse themselves to their hired companions for this or that, whereas our widow paid hers the compliment of telling a "tarradiddle," or white lie, in order to explain her recent interest in the timepiece.

"I was thinking," she said, "what a want of originality and sense of appropriateness there must be in clock-makers, since they all represent the progress of Time by hands, as if he was an acrobat. If legs were too unpoetical or indelicate, they might at least use wings."

"It is only with the exceptionally fortunate, however," returned Mary, smiling, "that Time moves on wings."

"I doubt whether people are always the happier for that," observed Mrs. Beckett.

"Perhaps not," assented Mary. "I should think those lives are the most enviable which are passed smoothly and equably, but not at eagle speed."

"That is not quite what I had in my mind," returned the widow, rising and looking thoughtfully through the open window. "I was thinking that when time seems to drag, because of our expectations, it is often better for us that it should drag on, and that they should remain without fulfilment. The secret of happiness in this world"—those three last words were mere garnish, and suited with her voice and manner no better than a flower made of a carrot or a turnip with some delicate *entrée*—"is not to expect, but to make the best of what we have. Was not that the front-door bell?"

The last observation was by no means uttered in the same philosophic tone as the rest, and a faint red suffused the widow's cheeks. The color, too, came into Mary Marvon's face, which was, however, averted from her patroness, as she answered, "I think so."

Then they remained silent. If they were listening for a step upon the stair they must have been very sanguine, or else in possession of the gifts of Fine Ear in the fairy tale, for three-pile carpets are not good conductors of sound. If they could have seen what was going on below stairs they would have seen *this*: a young man of four-and-twenty or so, bright-eyed and fresh-complexioned, but with that subdued air which betokens dry humor rather than that of the sparkling kind, had been admitted by the hall porter, and introduced by the good offices of two hall footmen to the butler, Harris. This personage preceded him up the staircase with much solemnity, but on the landing paused, perceiving that the visitor was not following him.

"All right, my man," said a cheerful voice from below; "I will be with you at the finish, but I really cannot go your pace."

Then he came up three steps at a bound, just in time to be announced at the drawing-room door as "Mr. Soth-eran."

"Oh, it's you, is it, Charley?" observed the widow, in a tone of undisguised disappointment.

"Well, yes; in default of a better, it's poor me. Were you expecting an hereditary prince, or what?"

"Lunch!" said Mrs. Beckett, sharply.

Whether this was a reply to his question or an order to Harris seemed doubtful; but the butler took it in the latter sense.

"It is served," he said, "me lady."

The title he used seemed out of place; but the fact was, though Mrs. Beckett had voluntarily descended in the social scale, her servants had objected to that arrangement. The old ones had been permitted after her second marriage to address her by the old phrase, which they pretended they could not forget, while the new ones adopted it readily enough, as giving importance to their office. Mrs. Beckett had made certain efforts to put a stop to it, and with this very man—"Remember I am not 'my lady,' Harris."

"Very good, me lady—I mean, ma'am—but having always been with persons of title, if you will please to remember, it is difficult, in your ladyship's presence, too" (Harris was astute, and would have made an excellent ambassador, except, perhaps, to the United States), "not to say 'me lady.'"

And I think Mrs. Beckett rather liked a practice which reminded the world how much she had given up, and from the noblest motives.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIEND OF THE HOUSE.

It was hard upon "Charley" that his hostess had made it manifest she would have preferred to welcome somebody else; but what he felt much more was, that Miss Marvon also received him with a similar lack of enthusiasm.

"You are early to-day," she said; not, indeed, without

a pleasant smile, but that belonged to her, and could no more be dispensed with than the Austrian lip or the Caucasian nose by their hereditary wearers: "I am afraid you are defrauding the revenue."

"And the tax-payers," added Mrs. Beckett, "which is me."

"And this it is to be in a government office!" exclaimed the young fellow, clasping his hands despairingly; "to rise—but only by ten pounds a year—with the lark, to work like a horse at a mill-wheel, and if one shares a half-holiday with the poorest, and gets away from one's house of toil upon a Saturday—"

"Come, take Mary's arm, sir," interrupted the widow, "and lead her down-stairs. No, my dear" (for Mary had modestly drawn back), "I will not inflict myself upon him, and he hasn't the strength for it. The duties of the young gentlemen in the Probate Office are too overwhelming."

"No one can say we have not the *will*," he began, imploringly.

"Be quiet, sir! you learn nothing but jokes there: Mary, I insist."

Charley drew the young lady's arm within his own, and, with a murmur, "How cruel she is to me!" led the way to the dining-room.

From the above it may be gathered that, though she had behaved to him so scornfully, Mr. Charles Sotheran was by no means looked on with disfavor by the lady of the house; and, indeed, she treated none of his sex with such familiarity. His mother was a clergyman's widow, who had been her school friend, and to whom she was still the "Kitty" of thirty years ago. She had promised her, when the boy came up to town, that Beckett House should be a home to him, and he came in and out of it, as he himself expressed it, like a cat for whom a hole has been cut in the door. It was pleasant to see the expression of the widow's eyes as she followed the pair down-stairs; a woman would have translated it at once: "I intend these two young people to be one, and a very pretty pair they'll make."

Flesh and blood, however, are not so easy to match as Dresden china, and, though Mrs. Beckett couldn't see it,

or rather would not, there was an obstacle to her good intentions. Though one of the young people was willing enough to meet her views, the other was not. A Scotch lady, whose daughter was recently married, was asked by an old friend whether she might congratulate her upon the event. "Yes, yes," she answered, "upon the whole it is very satisfactory; it is true Jeannie hates her gudeman, but then there's always a something." Mrs. Beckett took a similar view; she was aware that Mary Marvon had no love for Charley, but that circumstance did not deter her from pursuing her plan. When one has thirty thousand a year the will is strong. There was "always a something," she said to herself, and though her *protégée* might feel no great affection for the young man at present, it would surely come in time. She knew from her own case that a marriage could be happy without much previous attachment on the lady's part; and, alas! could be unhappy *with* it. Mary Marvon did not hate her possible gudeman; on the contrary, she liked him very much, except when he showed symptoms of liking her too well, when she always put a stop to his advances. This state of affairs puzzled her patroness not a little. She would have suspected any other girl in Mary's position of "looking a little higher" than at a clerk in the Probate Office, especially as she might have looked with success, for Miss Marvon's beauty and accomplishments, and perhaps the consciousness that she was the friend and *protégée* of a millionaire without a relative, had already brought more than one eligible suitor to her feet; but Mrs. Beckett knew Mary too well to impute any such motive to her. The girl was of a proud and independent spirit, very susceptible to kindness, but of a nature that would have resented patronage from an archangel.

The wealth that surrounded her, notwithstanding that until the last few months she had been altogether unaccustomed to it, affected her no more than summer sunshine. She admitted to herself that it was pleasant and enjoyable enough, but if it came on to rain, or even to snow, there were ways of passing one's existence within doors; she had resources of her own, and was independent of the weather.

These, however, were not material resources ; she had no patrimony ; indeed, she had never known either father or mother. The one had died six months before she saw the light, and the other when she was but an infant. Mrs. Sotheran, who had been her mother's friend, had put her out to nurse, educated, and in a manner adopted her. But though she had shown her every kindness, and taken the utmost care in the selection of her home, as regarded her well-being and comfort, that home had been a school. Though Mrs. Sotheran had often come to see her, she had never taken the orphan to her own house. The reason she had given for this was the state of her health (which, indeed, was delicate enough), the number of her family, and the calls upon her time made by an invalid husband ; but the circumstance, taken in connection with the undoubted affection Mrs. Sotheran entertained for her, had been to Mary always unaccountable, and of late years, and since she had begun to think for herself, even mysterious. Mr. Sotheran had now long been dead, the children (of whom Charlie was the youngest) had followed their father to the grave, and there was plenty of room in the cottage at Letcombe Dottrell for Mary Marvon. Yet she had never been invited thither.

Mary's school, although not a fashionable one, had been a high-class establishment. She had been well treated, well brought up, and had wanted for nothing. Mrs. Sotheran's explanation of the matter was, that only a moderate sum had been placed in her hands as provision for the orphan, and that it had been Mrs. Marvon's dying wish that it should be expended so as to shield her daughter's youth from the pangs and pains of poverty (from which she had herself suffered bitterly), and to fit her as best might be for the battle of life. There was not enough for Mary to live upon, but there was enough to keep her in comfort till she could provide for her own maintenance. A few hundred pounds, as Mary vaguely understood, was all that was left to her when, at eighteen years of age, she had exchanged the modest comfort of Minerva Seminary, Harrowgate, for the splendors of Beckett House. To Mrs. Sotheran she owed—as she owed everything else—her present position, and for this she was more grateful

to her than for all the rest. Not because it had opened for her the door of luxury, but for its introduction to one who had proved herself a gentle, considerate, and loving friend. Only on one subject had Mrs. Beckett and her young companion disagreed since the latter had come to share her home; namely, as regarded the young gentleman who was now escorting Mary down to luncheon. That Mr. Charles Sotheran was good-looking, good-tempered, agreeable, and very much a gentleman, Mary admitted; she had not a word to say against him except as a lover.

When Mrs. Beckett had gone on to hint that, though Charley's salary was small, and increased by no means "by leaps and bounds," a few strokes of her pen would soon alter all that, and that it would give her great pleasure to make them, Mary had demurely observed that Mrs. Beckett could not bestow her bounty upon a worthier object than Mr. Charles Sotheran; but that, so far as she (Mary) was concerned, he might have ten thousand a year, but would still be unacceptable to her as a husband.

"Then you must be either a born fool, Mary," cried the widow, for the first time losing her temper with her young favorite, "or you must have had your brain turned by romances."

"As we were never allowed to read romances at Minerva House, my dear Mrs. Beckett," returned Mary, cheerfully, but with a spot of red on each cheek, "I suppose I must accept the former of your two alternatives."

And she added a little courtesy by way of acknowledgment.

The courtesy, I think, went even further with Mrs. Beckett than her words; as a reproof, it affected her not one whit, for very rich people are rarely thin-skinned; but it showed the other's coolness and determination. Though the widow by no means gave up her object, from that moment she ceased to press it; she knew that, notwithstanding all the resources of science, there are some fruits which can never be brought on by forcing, and was compelled to believe that this was one of them. Henceforth she trusted to the sunshine and the showers: circumstance and opportunity.

As the three took their seats at the well-spread board Charley nodded in his off-hand way to a vacant chair : "What Banquo is sitting there?" he inquired.

"The Dornays promised to be here," said Mrs. Beckett, curtly.

"Oh, indeed, Banquo *and* Fleance ! Then I've got one of *their* chairs."

"Of course you have, sir; you were not expected, though we are very glad to see you, and they *were*."

"It is better to come to a feast when you are not asked," observed Charley, with a philosophic air, "than to be asked and not come."

"And much better manners," assented Mrs. Beckett, warmly. "For my part, I don't understand such conduct. Guests who come late to lunch are almost as bad as those who come late to dinner, and they are unpardonable. For my part, I cannot understand why society tolerates it."

"Still, it is a sign of good position," remarked Charley, with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "It is only important people who venture to do it. They are titled, and say to themselves, 'Our host is an inferior person, so will not resent our rudeness ;' or they are rich, and he owes them money, and dares not."

"How can you be so foolish, Charley?" said Mary, reprovingly.

"But, my dear Mary, it must be so," continued the young man, gravely, "or why does the host wait for them, to the inconvenience of his other guests, and though he knows the dinner is spoiling ? For my part, I always endure the extra half-hour with great patience for my host's sake ; for I say to myself, 'His debts will be made easier to him on this account, or perhaps forgiven to him.' He can't be so foolish or so slavish as to put up with such behavior *for nothing*."

"Upon my word, I think Charley's observations are very sensible," remarked Mrs. Beckett, grimly. "If people can get to a railway-station in time, they can come in time for dinner. A quarter of an hour for the difference of clocks I do allow, but beyond that I would not wait for a Rothschild or a royal highness."

“Yes, but then, you see, you don’t owe Rothschild anything, Mrs. Beckett, and royal highnesses are always in time.”

“Quite true,” replied the hostess, with approval. “It is only your *parvenus* who take such liberties.”

“Still there are such things as accidents,” put in Mary, apologetically.

“Accidents and offences,” muttered Charley.

“That is only another reason why nobody should wait,” argued Mrs. Beckett. “I always say to persons who are so ill-bred as to be behind time, ‘I was sure that nothing but an accident would have detained you, and therefore we sat down.’ Nobody but a madman, for example, would think of waiting for a doctor, who may be sent for at a moment’s notice. Harris, let those two dishes be taken out and kept warm.”

“Justice tempered with mercy,” observed Charley.

“You are a very impudent young man,” said the hostess, smiling.

“My dear Mrs. Beckett, you are altogether in error: it is native shyness—a thing that is often mistaken for sheer impertinence. I should not have dreamed of coming here to-day, for example—and without an invitation—and especially at luncheon time” (his hostess was hospitality itself, but here she smiled satirically), “if I had not had something to communicate to you of the last importance. I had news to-day from Letcombe Dottrell.”

“Good news, I hope?” inquired Mrs. Beckett, with interest. “The last time I heard from your mother she wrote in what was, for her, fairly good spirits.”

“She’s lost them now, poor thing!” sighed the young man.

“But what has happened?” cried Mary. “I heard from her only the other day. I’m quite sure there’s not much the matter, Charley, or, to do you justice, you would have told us long ago, instead of talking such nonsense.”

“That is the first civil word you have spoken to me, Mary. I’m so much obliged! It is so nice to hear you say you believe I have some natural affection. It puts one quite on a level with the brutes.”

“Will you tell us your news, sir?” broke in Mrs. Beck-

ett, impatiently. "Though we care nothing about *you*, you know how interested we both are in your dear mother. If you kept her in a state of suspense like this it would frighten her to death."

"That's just what's the matter with her," answered Charley. "She *is* almost frightened to death, and no wonder. There's a giant at Letcombe Dottrell."

"A what?" exclaimed both ladies, simultaneously.

"A giant! eight feet, nine feet, ten feet—I don't know how many feet he is—who takes his seven-leagued strides about the parish quite composedly. And he don't live in a caravan, either, as you may think, but at the hall itself. He is Mr. Beryl Paton's last *protégé*."

"Oh, Charley, this is too absurd!" ejaculated Mrs. Beckett.

"It's as true as that I sit here, madam, eating apricot omelet. In addition to the Archæologist, the Metaphysician, and the Everythingarians, whom the squire has gathered about him, there is now—last, but by no means least—a Giant."

"But why? There is nothing in being nine feet high, or even ten feet, to excite good Mr. Paton's sympathies. There must be merit, or at least presumed merit, or some pitiful misfortune, to do that."

"I don't know about that, Mrs. Beckett; perhaps he's an orphan giant; but there he *is*—looking down the cottagers' chimneys as he takes his walks abroad; and, what is worse, into the bedroom windows at the rectory. Mr. Wells has complained about it, but the giant says he can't help it; it's his natural focus; he's not in the same plane with his fellow-creatures."

"Why, Mr. Paton must be going mad!" exclaimed Mrs. Beckett.

"Going?" echoed the young man. "A less charitable person would have said gone."

"How shocking! Why, they say he owns half the county."

"Yes; that's what, of course, makes the case so very distressing." Not a muscle of the speaker's lips moved in the direction of a smile; nor did his hostess suspect the young man's seriousness for an instant, but Mary shot

at him a reproving glance. "Do you think it good taste," it said, or seemed to him to say, "to laugh at the weaknesses of so good a friend before her very face?"

"But where on earth, Charley, did Mr. Paton first see the creature?"

"Well, one would think, by my mother's description, that he must have seen him always; that it was impossible for such a portent, being in the same hemisphere, to avoid observation. But, as a matter of fact, Mr. Paton found him in a caravan. You know his passion for the wonders of nature; and, attracted by some advertisement of a straight-haired negress, he came upon this prodigy. Of course he was charmed with him, and expressed his astonishment that so great a man should not only condescend to be exhibited with the African lady, and for the same moderate charge of a penny, but should put up with a smaller type in their caravan advertisement. This roused the giant's ambition; he struck for higher wages and a separate establishment, and on his master's declining his terms, came straight away to Mr. Paton, as to his natural adviser and protector. The excitement in the neighborhood is prodigious, and you may imagine the sensation his arrival at the hall has created in the Happy Family itself."

"Oh, dear! dear! I can indeed," gasped the widow, now fairly sobbing with laughter. "You have never seen Mr. Paton and the *ménage* at the hall, Mary, or you would know how to appreciate this. But of course this creature is not going to *stop*, Charley: large as the house is, where can they put him?"

"I am sure I don't know; perhaps Mr. Paton will build a wing—"

At this moment, and while the air was rippling with mirth, the door opened, and in a voice as though he were introducing the guests to a funeral feast, the butler announced "Mr. Dornay and Mr. Ralph Dornay."

CHAPTER III.

DEFIANCE.

THERE are few social crimes more exasperating—at all events, to the *raconteur*—than the entrance of an outsider into a room where an excellent story is in course of narration. A Newfoundland dog coming out of the water and shaking himself over your light summer costume is nothing to it. It is an interruption not only unpardonable, but irreparable; let the new-comer be as anxious to mend matters as he may, the story is spoiled. Nothing can bring back “the splendor to the grass, the glory to the flower,” or set Humpty Dumpty on his legs again. This should be borne in mind by all those folks who, having the intention to give intellectual pleasure (which few of them have), are wont to ask some of their friends to “dinner,” and others “in the evening.” The former portion of the company are at their ease; they have established a mutual understanding and formed a regular regiment, with their watchwords and their countersigns; the others are raw recruits, and can never be welcomed as comrades.

It was not easy to discomfit Mr. Charles Sotheran, but the arrival of these new-comers made him exceedingly angry, and the more so because it was easy to perceive that his hostess and Miss Mary by no means shared his displeasure. Mrs. Beckett’s welcome to them was, indeed, tinged with irritation. “So you are come at last,” she said, but it was in a tone which implied that late was better than never, and the pressure of her hand was in both cases very reassuring. Miss Marvon said nothing but “Good-morning,” but she said it with her brightest smile, and her hand remained longer in that of Mr. Edgar Dornay (or so Mr. Sotheran thought) than the occasion at all demanded.

Mr. Edgar was the younger of the two visitors. A tall, well-favored fellow enough, save for a slight touch of effeminacy or dandyism. His slight black mustache was

twirled into points so sharp that they might have threaded the eye of a needle; he had a frameless, stringless glass, which stuck in his eye with the tenacity of a limpet, and he spoke with an elaborate slowness which seemed to suggest the extremity of exhaustion. But he had an intelligent face, nevertheless, and what he said was well expressed.

Mr. Dornay the elder was Edgar's uncle, and twice his age—the one being fifty, the other twenty-five—but there was no such disproportion of years in their appearance. Edgar's quiet ways and well-considered speech would have better suited one of an elder generation; his manner was essentially mature; it was only in his smile that youth was manifested. He did not often smile, but when he did so one acknowledged that a man could be beautiful: he reminded you of the Sun-god. Now, Mr. Dornay senior's smile was the worst part of him. He performed the operation, as the Scotch gentleman acknowledged that he joked, "with deeficulty," for fear of showing certain false teeth. It is terrible to reflect that when one grows old even a smile loses its charm. It is Nature's hint, perhaps, that it is time that our laughing days were over, but it is a very grim one.

When Ralph Dornay did not smile, or smiled with care, he was an attractive object, and not the least like an uncle. His age might have been guessed at forty, and his figure, set off by a dark-blue frock coat and an irreproachable white waistcoat, was that of a man still younger. His eye was bright, his voice cheery, and his speech gay and fluent. One would have set him down as a soldier of the genial, old-fashioned type, or one of those clever Irishmen who have contrived to smother their brogue. As a matter of fact, he was of no occupation, and an Englishman. He belonged to an ancient family, of which his nephew was the chief, and he regarded him with great respect accordingly. If it could not be said of him that he passed his life in defending Edgar's character, he was always ready to break a lance for him against the many antagonists whom the young man's airs and graces evoked. And this was the more creditable to him, as he could derive no material benefit from such championship. When

the junior branches of old families are in these days demonstrative in their attachment to the head of their house, he has generally something to give them. Though the feudal system is extinguished, human nature is much the same as it used to be; the difference is in degree and kind. Even a duke can now hardly insure protection and immunity for the peccadilloes of his vassals; but even in less ambitious quarters there are some good things going still, and for the maintenance of family loyalty there is no such preserving pickle as expectations. Now, Edgar Dornay, though in possession of Cliffe Park, the hereditary dwelling-place of his race, could not afford to live there, even if he had wished to do so, which was, however, far from being the case. The estate was mortgaged up to the hilt, and burdened with all sorts of payments to certain elderly relatives and connections, to whom the expression "first come, first served" was much more than a phrase. The present head of the family was, in fact, less well provided for than the branches, one of whom was Uncle Ralph himself. What he had was not very much, it is true; but when one is prudent and careful to spend every shilling upon one's own needs, a little money may be made to go a great way. He had certainly no hope of any increase from his nephew's garner.

Yet there were some who denied that Uncle Ralph's feudal attachment was altogether disinterested, since it was to his nephew's friendship that he owed his place in society. Edgar Dornay was not popular among his own sex, but his very unpopularity was in some sort a tribute to his importance. Men do not take the trouble to dislike the insignificant, and Edgar had made a certain position for himself. Without being a preacher of æsthetics, he could talk its jargon, and thoroughly understood the art of persuading folks that they are catching gleams of the Unintelligible, when in reality they only understand what you are saying about it. The women who wished to be thought artistic, philosophic, and also exceptionally well dressed, adored him. Women of a higher type he caught with another springe. With them he was as frank as with the others he was obscure; each one was flattered with the idea that he only "spread himself" for her,

and laid bare the aspirations of a noble nature which were concealed from the multitude by a mask of reticence and pedantry. For the rest, he was not without his good points; though Mr. Charles Sotheran could never perceive them. The one young gentleman had something too much of nature about him, the other a great deal too much of art. They mixed together no better than water and sulphur, and it was no spoon that could smooth matters between them. Mrs. Beckett had confided to Mary that she always felt on thorns when they were in each other's company; and it was because she had been expecting the Dornays that afternoon that "Charley" had not been received with his usual cordial welcome. The whole matter had been clear to him directly their names were mentioned, and easily accounted for the bitterness with which he had spoken of the Unpunctual. A vice never seems so reprehensible as when it is practised by those we dislike.

When the Dornays entered Sotheran rose from his seat and took his leave.

"So soon?" said Mrs. Beckett, in her kindest tone.

The tone, he knew, was to make amends for his voluntary exile; the words were a mere compliment.

"You will give my love to your dear mother when you write?" said Mary, warmly.

He nodded, and smiled grimly, as though he were thinking, "I haven't got it to give," or perhaps because he felt that he was leaving her with a happier rival.

A few words of kindness, too, were given him by the hostess after his departure. "What a bright fellow Charley is! I really don't know any one with such a flow of spirits."

To which Mr. Dornay the elder replied, "Quite true; a most engaging young man;" and his nephew yawned approval.

These tributes to the departed having been duly paid, the company proceeded to discuss their usual topics. The conversation was not intellectually above the level of that which takes place at most afternoon teas, which, while ranging from Shakspeare to the musical glasses, has a decided tendency towards the latter: though, thanks to the

food and wine, it had perhaps more vigor and spirit. Edgar spoke with severity against some new theory of admitting the principle of humor into decoration; alluded to the fancy alphabet, with its dropped H, in a well-known dining-room at Kensington; and animadverted against gargoyles in architecture. Though his views were far from lucid, they were well-expressed, and gave almost the same impression of solidity (though they had none) as a stereoscope. The red light of a chemist's shop under similar circumstances—*i. e.*, in a dense fog—assumes the resemblance of the sun. Uncle Ralph, though to all appearances rapt in admiration of his nephew's eloquence, understood not one syllable of it, and presently the widow herself "dropped off gorged" with so much splendid coloring, and observed, in a low tone, to him,

"You were at Ascot, of course, Mr. Dornay, on Thursday?"

"No, not I; the Derby is my only dissipation in that way;" then added, in a low voice, "Edgar was there, I am sorry to say, and, as usual, unfortunate."

"How naughty he is!" said the widow, looking towards the young man with more pity, one would say, for his bad luck than reprehension of his bad habits. "I shall take the opportunity of giving him a lecture. Mary, I see Mr. Dornay has no flower in his button-hole; choose him one from the conservatory."

The observation, of course, referred to Uncle Ralph; Mr. Edgar Dornay would as soon think of coming out without his hat as without a flower in his button-hole. Mary rose at once to obey, or oblige, her hostess. It was curious, but short as was the interval that had elapsed since Mrs. Beckett's attention had been diverted from decorative art, its high-priest had ended his dissertation upon it, and was now conversing with Mary in low tones upon some other subject—to judge from her look, at least an equally attractive one. As she rose he too left his chair; and having opened for her the glass door of the conservatory—hardly a sitting-room in Beckett House was without one—was about to follow her into it, when the widow called him back, in a tone which could not be gainsaid:

“You are an arbiter of taste, Mr. Edgar, as every one knows, but surely your uncle is the best judge of what flower he prefers for his own coat.”

So Uncle Ralph took his place by the young lady's side, closing the door behind them, while the widow and Edgar were left *tête-à-tête* together. A glass door is a non-conductor of sound, but one can see through it; and as Mr. Ralph Dornay wished to have a few words with his companion in private, he made a pretended admiration for Southern plants and trees his excuse for straying with her beyond the floral portion of the conservatory, and among the tropical vegetation. Though the old powers of fern-seed to render one invisible are scoffed at in these days, there is no doubt of ferns doing it if they are but tall enough; and the same, even without that reservation, may be said of palms.

“Do you know the language of flowers, Miss Mary?” inquired Uncle Ralph, in significant tones.

“When I was a child I learned it,” she answered, indifferently, but with an inner sense of expectancy, nevertheless, that it cost her some pains to conceal. She did not anticipate that Mr. Dornay was going to make love to her, but there was something in his voice which, in connection with what she knew of him, led her to fear—or hope—that he was about to speak of love.

“Then you know what the palm signifies,” he continued, looking up at the branches that canopied them. It was observable that throughout their interview Mr. Dornay always did look either up or down, and never at the face of his companion, so that a spectator (who did not hear him) would have said, “This gentleman thinks of nothing but trees and flowers.”

“The palm indicates victory,” said Mary, quietly.

“Just so. I am here to say that it lies within your grasp.”

“I do not understand you, Mr. Dornay.”

“I think you do. But it is only natural—or at all events prudent—that you should affect unconsciousness. You imagine that you are in the presence of an enemy, and are inclined to look upon even his gifts with suspicion.”

"I understand you now, Mr. Dornay," she replied, and this time very coldly, "even less than before."

"Then your change of tone belies you, my dear young lady," he answered, curtly. "Come, the opportunity that has been afforded for our speaking together must needs be short; do not let us waste time in fencing. You will admit, I suppose, at least this much, that you love my nephew. Your face, indeed, tells me so; for while I speak of him it has changed as though this white camellia had become a red one. But I have known it long ago; Edgar and I have no secrets from each other."

"I am very sure that your nephew never told you—what you have just now had the impertinence to imply."

"Quite true, Miss Mary. He only told me that he loved you; I took it for granted that there was reciprocity; the theory of 'the most favored nation' holds equally good with individuals. I must needs add, in spite of your disclaimer, that you knew that I knew it. Confess, now, that you have hitherto considered me as—well, not as an enemy, perhaps, but an antagonist, an obstacle, but for which the course of true love would have run more smoothly. I have never treated you, I hope, with disrespect, but in a manner, I confess it, that may have suggested hostility."

The girl looked up at him with disdain. The expression was lost upon him, for he was regarding an orange on its tree with all the attention of an intending purchaser; but he could not escape the scornfulness of her tone.

"You have treated me, Mr. Dornay," she said, "I do not say with studied indifference, but with that indifference which is natural to you when you are addressing persons of no consequence, and from whom you can reap no benefit."

"Bitter, bitter!" returned the other, with a reproachful look at the golden fruit; "to think that a thing so beautiful should have pips in it."

"As to your being an obstacle," she continued, "if anything which such as you can say can turn a man's heart from her he loves, and induce him to give her up, for her own sake he had better do so; for if she be a true woman,

let her be ever so poor, he would not be worthy of her."

"Heroics!" muttered the other, contemptuously; "you should speak them in blank verse." Blank or not, however, there had been something in her words that had gone home to him, for his voice trembled with rage as he added, "Upon my life, young woman, you are not very conciliatory!"

"It would be useless for me to be so, even if I felt inclined, which I do not," was the quick rejoinder. "Conciliation with some people has only the effect of encouraging them to tread on you."

"I recognize the sentiment, Miss Mary, which I heard expressed the other day—only more in the rough—by the young gentleman who has just taken his leave of us. I would respectfully advise you—for the object you have at heart—not to sit at the feet of that youthful Gamaliel; Edgar and I do not like him."

"Very likely. To one, at least, of you I can imagine his independence of character being very unwelcome."

"In a clerk of the Probate Office, of tender years, I must confess it seems to me somewhat out of place," answered Dornay. "On the other hand, it is an easy rôle to play, and admits of great self-indulgence in the way of impertinence; nor do I lose sight of the fact that Mr. Charles Sotheran may think it acceptable to a certain person, as an agreeable change from the flattery and adulation that she meets with elsewhere."

"Fresh air after incense! Well, that is very complimentary," said Mary, smiling for the first time.

"I should rather call it pumped air," said Mr. Dornay. "However, Mr. Sotheran is not worth debate. What I wish to say is, that however right you may have hitherto been with respect to my feelings towards you as regards my nephew, they have undergone a complete change. I have done my best to oppose your union with him, and have failed. I lay down my arms and acknowledge myself vanquished. Henceforth I am upon his side and yours. If you will not permit me to be your friend—"

She shook her head and drew back: "I mistrust you, Mr. Dornay," she said, coldly.

"Edgar told me that you were frankness itself, and begad he's right!" exclaimed the other, admiringly. "If he had but half your determination of character he would be in a very different position; but he is so damned weak!—I beg your pardon for the expression, Miss Marvon!"

She bowed: "You forget to whom you are apologizing, sir; I am only a dependent."

"Very true, but you are going to be Mrs. Dornay," observed the other, naïvely. "Now, my dear young lady," do be reasonable," he continued, remonstratingly. "If we can never be friends—which is your suggestion, not mine, remember—at least let us be allies. When you become my nephew's wife, consider how inconvenient—not to put it more strongly—this mutual distrust will be to both of us. You will have great influence, no doubt; but I am the nearest relation, and should anything occur to shake the pillars of domestic peace, as Edgar calls it, he will naturally look to me for advice. Then I may do you a good turn."

"I do not believe you are picturing me as your nephew's wife at all, Mr. Dornay," was the girl's quiet reply.

"I am. Upon my soul and honor I am!" put in the other, vehemently. "As sure as I breathe I will do my very best to bring about your marriage. That is what I have come here to say, so help me Heaven!"

"It may be so. But you have something else to say. You have omitted to name the price I am to pay for your valuable assistance." It could not have been the effect of sunlight, because they both stood in the shade; though those who knew him best would certainly have ascribed it to some atmospheric illusion; but here Mr. Ralph Dornay blushed.

"I don't know what you mean, Miss Mary," he answered; "but of course there are considerations. I have hinted to you how we can, as near connections, be mutually useful to one another in the future."

"And in the meantime?" said the girl, scornfully. "Is there nothing I can do for you in the meantime?"

"Nothing. You have already said, though in a manner that I hope your better nature has already repented of, that you could be of no advantage to me."

"True. Still, it strikes me that it may have struck you, Mr. Dornay, that circumstances may arise in which I might be of some *disadvantage* to you. Humble as is my position, it is just possible my advice may be asked by a certain person upon a matter in which you are very much interested ; one which has only recently entered your mind, I think, but which is now monopolizing it, and concerning which, to use your own candid language, I might do you a good turn—or not."

"Well?" It was but a monosyllable, yet pregnant with significance, and the speaker for the first time looked full in his companion's face with anxious intentness.

"If I am asked my opinion of that matter, Mr. Dornay," she continued, "I shall give it honestly. Nothing which you can promise me, nothing which you can give me (which is very different), will deter me from so doing. On the other hand, your secret is as safe with me as it was before you spoke. I will do you no voluntary injury, though you have done many a one to me."

"I never have," he murmured.

"Yes, sir ; for slights, humiliations, even neglect itself, to one like me, are injuries. Though you used no daggers you have spoken them designedly, and of malice prepense ; words that lie as ready to the tongue of the upstart and the coward as does the dagger to the hand of the assassin. I do not forgive them ; I do not forget them ; but I should scorn myself as I scorn you if they suggested retaliation. And now that we clearly understand one another, what flower shall I gather for your button-hole, Mr. Dornay?"

Without a word he pointed to the nearest flower, which happened to be a blush rose. She clipped it with her scissors and gave it to him ; then turned and led the way back to the dining-room.

CHAPTER IV.

LEAP YEAR.

It is not the scene which dictates the sentiment, or the conversation between Uncle Ralph and Mary Marvon among the ferns and flowers would have been of a very different kind to that we have described.

The dining-room, on the other hand, though a very noble apartment, would hardly have suggested by association—not to mention the *débris* of lunch which still strewed the table—any tender topic ; yet no sooner did the other couple leave it, and the widow find herself alone with Mr. Edgar Dornay, than her voice and manner softened, and her face became full of a gentle earnestness and sympathy.

“My dear Edgar,” she said, in a pleasant voice, “I have got something very serious to say to you.”

He took the chair beside her to which she had beckoned him, and answered, with his brightest smile, “Your preface frightens me, my dear Mrs. Beckett ; but you don’t *look* serious, which gives me consolation.”

“I wish to look serious, Edgar ; vexed and disappointed too ; nay, I would be downright angry with you, only somehow I never can. I am sure I don’t know what it is that makes me so kind—nay, blind—to your failings.”

She spoke half interrogatively, as though if he had any theory upon that point she would be glad to hear it, but he only shook his head.

“That is my best chance with you and with everybody,” he said, hastily, “that they should shut their eyes, or, at the worst, wink at my peccadilloes, for they are many.”

“Well, it is something that you show humility,” she answered, though with a touch of disappointment mingling with that faint praise ; “and I do believe they are but peccadilloes, Edgar.”

"I don't know," he answered. "Some moralists would be very severe on me ; but you, I venture to think, are not a hanging judge."

"By which you mean, I suppose, you naughty man, that I would not hang *you*?" She tapped his hand lightly with her fingers, and looked at him certainly with an expression very different from that of a judge when he puts on the black cap. Mrs. Beckett had not actually taken to caps, but, perhaps as much for concealment as for ornament, a piece of lace, scarce the size of her own plump hand, was arranged becomingly enough in her brown hair, still un-mixed with gray.

"Well, yes ; I venture to think you would lean to mercy's side in my case."

"But then, Edgar, I don't believe you have ever done anything very wrong."

"That is very good of you, though it shows an excess of charity. It is true, however, that I have never committed murder."

"Nor suicide," said the widow, lightly. "Come, that's two off the list of your possible delinquencies."

"I am not so sure about suicide," returned the young man, laughing. "There are some people who, if they knew all, would at least accuse me of contemplating it."

The widow's face grew grave, and the color rushed to her cheeks. "What people?" she asked, in a tone of indignation.

"The world at large ; you know what an interest it takes in one's private affairs."

"Yes ; how much better it imagines it understands them than one's self," she added, contemptuously. "For my part, I have long learned to value its opinion at its true worth."

She took up a leaf that had fallen from the flower-stand on the table and flipped it from her with a finger-snap.

"But then, my dear Mrs. Beckett, you are above the world. This earthly ball lies at your feet."

"And at yours also," she said, gravely.

"That is true in a sense, of course, but in a very different sense," he rejoined, thoughtfully ; "young men are always given that comfortable assurance ; but if they kick the

ball—or even *at* it—they have often cause to repent of their audacity. What happens to those who ‘fly in the face of society’ is very similar to the fate of those sea-birds who dash themselves to pieces against the lanterns of lighthouses.”

“That happens from their ignorance,” observed his companion. “They are right enough in seeking for warmth and light. To my mind, the real happiness of life lies in comfort.”

“That is a wide term, my dear Mrs. Beckett. Your ideas of comfort, for example”—he glanced round the room, on the walls of which hung landscapes of Linnell (the widow’s favorite painter), and on whose ceiling glowed the bright hues she loved, arranged with harmonious skill—“would to some people appear very like luxury.”

“And why not? The more of comfort one has the better. Everything else in the way of enjoyment sooner or later fades. I have experienced it myself, Edgar. You will say, perhaps, ‘But you are a woman;’ I doubt whether that makes much difference, in the long-run; but if you think otherwise, ask your uncle. He is a man of the world, and thoroughly understands it.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Beckett,” objected the young man, “you have called a most damaging witness. Uncle Ralph is a martyr to fashion. His boots and, what is worse, his waistcoats are a size too small for him. He dines out continually—here, for example—where he can get no smoke after dinner, though he pines for tobacco after every meal like the bulbul for its mate; he even goes to evening parties, and from sheer exhaustion—not from dancing (he knows better than that), but from boredom—is driven to partake of bad champagne. Comfort! why, comfort is not more ‘scorned of devils’ than it is by Uncle Ralph.”

“I beg your pardon; he does not scorn it. On the contrary, he sacrifices himself for the present in the hope of finding himself at last in cotton wool.”

“Indeed!” smiled the young man. “Well, it may be so; you ladies have sharper eyes than we have.”

“At all events, we see farther. What I wish to urge

upon you is not only to think of to-day, but of to-morrow."

"Just so; the future," said Edgar, rising from his chair and pacing the room. It was evident that he had forgotten where he was. "After the suicide of which we were speaking there is another life."

"May I ask what was the particular form of self-destruction you were contemplating?" inquired the widow. Her eyes were on the table, her hand was busy with some crumbs that lay before her.

"I cannot tell you that," replied the young man; "it would not be fair to others."

There was a long silence; the widow bit her lip; she looked disappointed, vexed, like one who has been pursuing the wrong tack. She was not vexed with her companion, however, for it was in a voice even gentler than before that she once more addressed him:

"If I may be allowed to say so, Edgar, you have two great failings—imprudence and indecision. It is about the first I wish to speak to you—that is to say, if you will listen."

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, suddenly stopping in his walk, and resuming his seat beside his companion; "I was lost in thought, and for the moment imagined myself at home."

"It was not such a very great mistake, I hope," was the gentle reply.

"It was not, indeed," replied the other. "Your house has been always, ever since I have had the pleasure of knowing you" (it was some eighteen months), "like home; that is, it isn't the least like it," he added, with ludicrous inconsistency. "Ralph and I live in a garret."

"You are always welcome—always, always," continued the widow, earnestly, and without paying attention to this melancholy statement, "and will ever be so. It is here, above all, that you must come when you need help, Edgar."

The young man colored to the roots of his hair; the beautiful path that ran straight up the middle of it looked as if it had been newly gravelled.

"Your advice, I know, has been always most kindly

proffered," he answered, evasively, "and would be most valuable, if I only had the sense to take it."

"Advice, my dear Edgar, is what everybody is willing to give; it costs less than a gas-fire, and looks as warm and genial; but, though it fills the giver with a virtuous glow, the recipient is often not much the better for it. Now, when I say help, I mean it."

"I am sure you do," answered the young man, drawing lines upon the table-cloth with one of his filbert nails, and listening with feverish impatience for the click of the glass door. A gentle perspiration, such as doctors hail in a feverish patient, bedewed his brow. He was not so much afraid of the widow—indeed, he had a very kindly regard and esteem for her—as he was distrustful of himself. He felt that a crisis was approaching which would compel him to take one of two courses which had long presented themselves to him; he had, in fact, made up his mind which to choose, only decision was abhorrent to him. It was especially abhorrent now, since the course he had determined upon would be unwelcome to his companion. His artist nature shrank from inflicting pain on any one, but especially on himself; his position was really a painful one.

"A little bird tells me that you had an unlucky day at Ascot," said the widow, gently.

"A blue bird with a white breast, was it not?" answered the young fellow, forcing a laugh and nodding towards the conservatory. "It is the birds of bright plumage that talk the most, though they are not good at singing."

"He sings your praises, at all events, you ungrateful man; knowing, doubtless, that they are always pleasing to me."

"You are very good to say so, Mrs. Beckett."

"Was the sum a large one, may I ask, Edgar, which you so unfortunately ventured?"

Again the color rushed to the young man's face. "I am not accustomed to bet more than I can pay," he answered, stiffly.

"That you are not accustomed to do anything dishonorable, Edgar, I am well aware," was the gentle reply; "but you are very imprudent."

"It is my nature," he returned, quickly. "People talk of 'living up' to this and that; I think I may honestly say that, whatever income I possessed, I should live up to the last shilling of it."

"Perhaps if you were very rich you would think differently," said the widow, gravely. "There is a certain sense of responsibility that attaches to great wealth."

"I don't think that would oppress me, whatever else might in such a case," answered the young man, lightly.

"Then, I am afraid, you must be naturally extravagant."

"I *am*," he replied, with a certain earnest frankness; "and I resent above all things any check or restraint; that is one of the reasons why I hate Cliffe Park, because it is tied up and I can't get rid of it."

"But surely, Edgar," argued the widow, gravely, "it must be a comfort to feel that something—though it may not be much—is made secure to you in spite of all reverses of fortune."

"Not a bit of it. If I could sell that wretched place to-morrow, for example, and pay these Ascot debts—not, of course, but that I *can* pay them," he added, hastily, "from other sources."

"Just so; only it is inconvenient to part with a few thousands."

"It would be if I owed them," returned the young man, laughing; "most uncommonly inconvenient."

"Then your loss is a mere trifle," remarked the widow, with an involuntary sigh.

"To you it would be a mere flea-bite, my dear Mrs. Beckett," he replied; "but to me £500 is—well, £500."

"You have stated the case quite correctly, Edgar; in a manner, too, that I could not have done, since it would have savored of ostentation. As this sum is to me 'a mere flea-bite,' while to pay it is to you a matter of some consequence, will you not allow me—it would be a very great pleasure—to take the privilege of an old friend?"

"My dear Mrs. Beckett, the thing is impossible!" exclaimed the young man, starting to his feet.

"Nay, nay, it is certainly not impossible," she answered, "because it is as easy for me to do it as it is for you to resume your seat."

He bit his lip, but took the chair which she pushed gently towards him.

"There is nothing to be offended at, surely, Edgar. When we posted to Virginia Water the other day you thought it no humiliation, I suppose, because I paid for the postilions and the turnpikes. This carafe of water is more than I need, more than I can drink; shall I not fill your glass for you if you are thirsty? Where is the obligation?"

"All that is different," murmured the young man; "you know it is different."

"Because money, forsooth, is held by foolish persons to be different from everything else. Suppose, then, I were to die to-morrow, and it was found that I had not, as the phrase goes, 'forgotten' you: that it was my wish, as it is my wish, Edgar, Heaven knows, to make the road of life smooth for you: that I had, in short, left you half my fortune? You would accept it then; but now, when I am alive, and when the knowledge of my having conferred some benefit upon you would give me pleasure—the greatest pleasure, perhaps, of which my mind is capable—you reject it; you spurn it."

"Pardon me, dear Mrs. Beckett, I do not spurn it. I appreciate your generosity exceedingly; and if I hesitate, it is not so much on my own account, believe me."

"Nay, nay," she interrupted haughtily, "I cannot admit that plea. I am old enough—I mean, I have had experience enough of life, Edgar, to be fully capable of taking care of my reputation. I know my position thoroughly; what the world thinks of me I care not; what it will dare to say of me is not much. They are coming in" (she looked towards the glass door). "There is no time to speak further on this matter; reflect upon it; turn it over in your mind."

"I will."

"In the meantime, I will write to you.—What, Mary, only a common rose for Mr. Dornay, after all this time spent in choosing it!"

"A common rose, madam," said Uncle Ralph, with a bow and a smile, "like common honesty and common sense, is not so very common; and, moreover, it stands for true love, which is rarer still."

CHAPTER V.

THE OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

It seems to have escaped the notice of those social teachers who are so good as to point out to their fellow-creatures how to get on in the world, how great a factor in that matter, sometimes for good, more often for evil, is rapidity of action caused by the hatred of suspense. It is not exactly impatience, the "raw haste" which the poet describes as "half-sister to delay," but the desire to know the worst or the best. Though most frequently found in impulsive natures, it is not peculiar to them. One of the most methodical men of his time, and the most successful in his calling of all time, possessed this attribute in excess. On the one hand, it caused him never to lose an opportunity: he "caught the skirts of happy chance" throughout his life; but, on the other, he often renounced great gains in order to get a matter settled and off his mind.

Mrs. Beckett, notwithstanding her boasted experience of life, had never learned to be patient; she had always acted more or less upon impulse, and her vast wealth had increased this tendency. Royal personages do not write when they have a fancy for anything; they telegraph for it, or send a special messenger. We read of Louis XIV. that on one occasion "he had almost to wait," but the catastrophe itself was averted.

No sooner had her two visitors departed than the widow was consumed with a desire to despatch that letter to the younger of them of which she had spoken to him. "In the meantime I will write to you," she had said, not because she had found speaking difficult, but the getting an answer from him. She felt that he had stood on his guard and parried her thrusts, without absolutely becoming her antagonist. He had been very careful not to hurt her feelings, whereas, if he had quite made up his mind to reject her advances, he might have repelled them with a

word or two, such as she could have scarcely blamed him for using in self-defence. It was plain to her that he was in a state of indecision : on the one hand, well disposed for a life of ease and opulence ; on the other, sensitive to the ridicule that would attach to him for the price he would have to pay for it. She did not dream of having a rival in his affections, she had never heard a whisper of such a thing ; that view of the case did not occur to her at all, perhaps because she was secretly conscious that affection—on his side at least—was not much concerned in the matter. She knew that Edgar liked her, and persuaded herself that his liking, when he came to know the sacrifices she was prepared to make for him, would turn to love. But in the meantime she could hardly write of the sacrifices ; she could not say, “ If you marry me I will settle this and that upon you absolutely, and make you entirely independent of me.” She was secretly conscious that he had exaggerated his tendency to extravagance and his dislike to all financial control, in order to dissuade her from her purpose ; but she ignored it. Her Edgar, if he would be hers, should be as extravagant as he pleased, and have nothing to complain of in the way of restriction. She had fallen over head and ears in love with him.

There was certainly some disparity in their ages, and that on the wrong side ; but Edgar looked old for his years, while she looked young, and, what was more, felt so. She had had troubles, severe ones, but they had not broken her spirit ; her capacity for affection was as great as ever. In her first marriage she had not looked for love ; in her second she had looked in vain for it. It was still, as it were, owed to her, and there was yet time to enjoy it ; and even if it were not thoroughly reciprocated, might not her third union be as happy as her first, where reciprocity had also been wanting, though, in that case, from her own side ? At the worst, she was convinced, and not without reason, that Edgar Dornay would never treat her ill. For her friends, she had arguments enough for taking this step. With her enormous fortune she felt the need of a protector and adviser, etc. ; she knew their remonstrances would not be very strong ; and as for her enemies, she could afford to defy or to despise them.

But the unfolding of her intentions to Edgar himself was a very different matter. Even the simple "Yes" or "No" required from the blushing maiden whose hand has been asked in marriage is said to be an embarrassing affair. Conceive, then, what a task lay before the widow, who was herself about to put the question instead of answering it! And she had not even the excuse of a leap-year. It was easy enough to begin "My dear Edgar," and to end "Yours faithfully, Kate Beckett;" the difficulty lay in the intermediate matter.

A snow-storm of torn-up letters went on in the widow's boudoir before she could compose one to her mind; if it was not a pretty letter after all, that may be set down to the necessity of the case; under the circumstances, it was perhaps as good a one as could have been written:

"MY DEAR EDGAR,—If we had not been interrupted this morning, I had made up my mind to speak to you upon a certain subject about which—for suspense in this matter is intolerable to me—I am now compelled to write. It is a subject so very delicate and difficult for me to touch upon, that I should not venture to do so but for the confidence I feel that I am not only addressing a man of honor, who will respect my secret, but a man of feeling, who will understand what it costs me to reveal it."

(The above sentence was not composed in a hurry. Even when it was written she was dissatisfied with it. She thought the expression "costs" might remind him inopportunately of her money.) "It is not usual for ladies to write to gentlemen upon such a topic; my very housemaid would hesitate to give to the young man with whom she 'keeps company' that fateful ring (with O.K.K.B. W.P. on it), which she accepts from him with such alacrity; it is a woman's province to wait for her wooer. Unhappily, I do not share the common lot. My position is an exceptional one. If I am so fortunate as to have won the affections of an honorable man, certain considerations would seal his lips; and the more worthy he is of being beloved, the more closely they would seal them. Ever since I have known you, Edgar, I have been a happier woman" (perhaps it was fortunate that their acquaint-

ance had not been a prolonged one ; it would have been malapropos under the circumstances to remind him that she had known him from his childhood). "Your companionship has cheered me ; your intelligence has delighted my mind ; and, above all, your heart, or so I have flattered myself, has beaten responsively to mine. Your behavior of late, and especially to-day, leads me to believe that a mistaken sense of independence may have kept you silent upon a matter in which your happiness may be, as mine most certainly is, concerned. The inequality of our fortunes may, to one of your sensitive nature, have put a padlock on your tongue. That is foolish, Edgar, for there is an inequality of age between us—ten years or more, I fear" (it was nearer twenty)—"which, if this matter were one of bargain, which Heaven forbid, might fairly be written off against it. If a false pride, or an unfounded mistrust, prevents your speaking to me of what is in your heart, I entreat you for both our sakes to discard them. If, on the other hand, I have deceived myself, it is better that I should be undeceived. Your generous heart will forgive a fond and foolish woman who has mistaken regard for love, and a natural kindness of heart for a particular inclination.

Yours faithfully,

"KATE BECKETT."

Then came the postscript, which, though it would be cynical to say it contained the pith of the matter, was of considerable importance : "Whatever may be your reply to this, I trust you will accept the enclosed ; if not as an earnest of the many offices of loving-kindness I hope to do for you, then as a small testimony of what, at all events, will be a lifelong friendship. I will only add that instead of being five hundred I wish it were five thousand."

Having concluded this remarkable composition, it seemed to the writer that every moment it lay on her table, or even in the post-office, was lost time ; the possibility of the Sunday intervening before Edgar could hear from her was a terrible thought ; so she sent the note by hand.

"Any answer, me lady?" inquired the tall footman to whom its custody was intrusted.

That she expected an answer we may well imagine, and

it was not without an inward struggle that she replied, "No ; you need only leave the letter ;" she would, in truth, have liked the man to have waited in the hall of the Aglaia Club for her correspondent's reply.

When the letter had gone she half regretted not having added another postscript, "Please acknowledge check ;" not that she was solicitous about its safety, but that it would have necessitated an immediate response. Nor was this wholly owing to impatience of suspense. If she did not know quite as much about Mr. Edgar Dornay as she thought she did, she was well aware that he was a man of impulse, and that her best chance of carrying his somewhat slackly defended heart was by a *coup de main*.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO TO ONE.

THE withdrawal of Mrs. Beckett to her boudoir was a matter of some surprise to Miss Marvon, for it was not the custom of the elder lady thus to seclude herself. She did not much care for general society, of which she had seen enough and to spare, but she liked companionship, and especially that of her young friend. It seemed, therefore, incumbent on her to offer some sort of explanation for her late seclusion.

"I have been writing some letters, my dear," she said ; which was true enough if twenty copies of one letter constitute a plural.

"Could I not have helped you, dear Mrs. Beckett?"

"Well, no ; I don't think you could, my dear."

There was a tinge of red in the widow's cheek as she said so, and also a faint smile on her lip, for she was not without some sense of humor. "Would it be indiscreet to inquire what you and Mr. Ralph were talking about all that time in the conservatory?"

It was Mary's turn to blush now.

"Well, among other things, he was eloquent upon the language of flowers."

"Indeed!" said the widow, smiling. "I must take more care of you, Mary. I had no idea that you had made an impression in that quarter."

"Nor I," answered the other, dryly.

"I am glad you do not take his attentions very seriously, for I am afraid Mr. Ralph is rather a butterfly. However, no one can deny that he is very agreeable, though he always rather reminds me of the poet of whom it was said that he could write lines to a broomstick. He is so very enthusiastic about everything, and at the shortest possible notice."

Mary, who had been always careful to evince no personal hostility to Uncle Ralph for the very reason she had given to him, was now more chary of her censure than ever. She only smiled adhesion to her companion's sentiments.

"How Charley hates him!" continued the widow. "It is such a pity."

"It is a pity, at all events, that he shows it so," observed Mary.

"No doubt. A young man who has his way to make in the world should not make himself enemies."

"Still, Mr. Ralph Dornay tried to snub him."

"True. And, as you say, 'tried' without altogether succeeding in it. Charley has a cool, quiet way with him, which I have often reprov'd, but which, I confess, not a little tickles me. In a minister of state it would be admirable, but in a young government clerk it is very impertinent. What an immense difference social position makes! Supposing a young man—I don't say Charley, but one like Charley—"

"Upon my word, dear Mrs. Beckett," interrupted Mary, laughing, "I don't believe there is one."

"I am glad to hear you say so, my dear," said the widow, significantly.

"Oh, I didn't mean anything so very much in his favor," answered Mary, quietly; "we were talking of his cool ways. But I am interrupting you; you were supposing a young man."

"Yes; suppose a young man, I was about to say, equal to Charley in intelligence, though in another line, who

should suddenly exchange a moderate position for one of great wealth, what a splendid future would lie before him!"

Mary gave a little shrug of her shoulders.

"That depends, my dear Mrs. Beckett. Of course, as you have just said, his liveliness would pass for wit, and his talents for genius; but the motive for exerting himself would be taken from him. Being in the lap of luxury, there is a temptation to sit there, and take what the gods provide one in a golden spoon."

"Yet it would surely be a spur to his ambition to feel that with the advantages he has become possessed of almost anything would be within his grasp. In a man of moderate means, however able, the sense of the impossibility of success crushes endeavor. In a general way, you know, I am rather a sentimental person, but, for the reason I have just given, I do not think that clever young men should marry penniless girls."

"Perhaps not," said Mary, gravely. "You presume, however, that the alternative is given them of marrying for money?"

"Let us say marrying money. Why should we say 'for' money because a man marries a woman who happens to possess it? Of course, there must be the alternative. If Charley, for instance, had had any chance of winning an heiress, I am not sure, my dear, notwithstanding my high opinion of you, that I should have recommended him to your attention."

"Then I wish he had had the chance," said Mary, smiling. She could speak lightly enough of Charley; but some one else had been brought to her mind by her companion's words, of whom she could not so speak. The thoughts of both ladies, without any mutual consciousness of the fact, had been dwelling on the same man. The case Mrs. Beckett had been supposing was that of Edgar Dornay; and it had suggested to Mary whether her encouragement of that young man's attentions might not be an act of selfishness which would smother an honorable ambition, and cut him off from possibilities of greatness. It was a very delicate scruple, for, beyond the recommendation of a change of color in the decoration of Mrs. Beck-

ett's boudoir, Mr. Edgar Dornay had at present effected no particular intellectual revolution, nor, indeed, accomplished anything which the world would not have willingly let die.

"I never denied that Charley had his faults, my dear," continued Mrs. Beckett, forgetting her *rôle* as advocate of Charley's cause, and only using him as a perch from which to fly to the subject which was monopolizing her mind; "his prejudices, for example, are often as strong as they are groundless. I don't believe, for instance, he likes Edgar himself one bit better than he likes his uncle."

"I don't think he quite understands his character," observed Mary, with a show of indifference.

"He doesn't give himself the trouble to study it," said the widow, vehemently.

"It's a great pity," observed Mary, gently.

"I call it abominable of him," continued the widow. "The way in which he jumped from his seat when our other visitors entered the room to-day, and murmured something about 'another engagement,' was too transparently indecent. One would have thought they had had the small-pox out upon them."

"They did interrupt his story, however," said Mary, apologetically. Her sympathies were always "retained for the defence," and, moreover, she was anxious to turn the conversation from its present topic. She loved to think about Edgar Dornay—indeed, she thought about him whether she would or no—quite as much as her companion, but, unlike her, she was averse to speak about him. "I confess I was very much interested about the giant at Letcombe Dottrell. What a curious person Mr. Paton must be!"

"Curious is no word for him, my dear. He is as mad about some things as a March hare; only, being so very rich, he is considered merely eccentric."

"But I have always heard he was very benevolent."

"Well, yes; except in one particular direction. In that respect he is like Howard the philanthropist, who liked everybody except his own flesh and blood."

"Why, I understood Mr. Paton had no relations."

"Nor has he any near ones. But he once had an only

son. 'A little more than kin, and less than kind,' should be the family motto, for they two hated one another like poison."

"How shocking!"

"It was, indeed. I don't know who was to blame for it in the first instance; but the breach grew wider and wider, till there was no bridging it over. At last the son ran away with a young woman very inferior to him in social station—the village organist—which caused a dreadful scandal."

"That is the sort of marriage which the world is slowest to forgive," sighed Mary, thoughtfully. "I suppose the world is right, but it seems very hard."

"In this case its forgiveness was not required," observed the widow, dryly, "for they were never married at all. For all that, however, young Henry Paton stuck to the girl in a certain fashion—not that he could have really loved her, for he ill-treated her, and, in the end, deserted her; but he would never marry any one else. He declined to form an alliance which would have been at least respectable, and on which his father insisted, as the basis of their reconciliation. And, last of all, he crowned his enormities (for I assure you they were not mere peccadilloes) by trying to put his father into a lunatic asylum, which he very nearly accomplished."

"What a terrible history!" exclaimed the girl. "And is the young man dead?"

"Yes. He was killed in some drunken brawl in New York, and mourned by no one except by his poor mother."

"She is alive, then?"

"Yes; and as good a woman as ever breathed. Mr. Paton, too, to do him justice, is the kindest of husbands; but he has forbidden her ever to mention her son's name to him. What was at first mere heat against him in the end turned to hate, so that his very memory is loathsome to him. What is stranger than all, this vehement detestation has affected the old man's general views of life. Naturally of a most tender and sympathizing disposition, he will never admit the tie of blood as a motive for affection. He looks upon relations as humorists depict mothers-in-law, while, on the other hand, his great house is full of

living objects of benevolence, not always chosen with good judgment. Charley called them, if you remember, 'The Happy Family'—poets, painters, inventors, and all the intellectual tag, rag, and bobtail who are always on the lookout for money and a patron."

"How very curious! And do you know this Mr. Paton?"

"A little. He had some acquaintance at one time"—here the widow pressed her lips together—"with my second husband. Mr. Rennie has been his man of business for years, and your friend, Mrs. Sotheran, of course, is very intimate at Letcombe Hall, since she lives in the same parish."

"And yet she has never mentioned to me one word about Mr. Paton," said Mary; "I have only heard of him from others."

"How curious!—Thanks." This to the servant, who had just placed a letter in his mistress's hand. A glance at the address was sufficient to tell her from whom it came. It was the one she had been expecting with such impatience, but she had certainly no right to complain upon the score of delay. It was not yet dinner-time, and her own letter had not been despatched more than two hours. She argued favorably (from what she knew of Edgar's character) from this prompt reply. At all events, she held in her hand the key of her future happiness or, let us say, discontent, for misery would certainly be too strong a word.

The moment was a supreme one, but then she was not unaccustomed to such supreme moments. Moreover, as we get on in years all moments (save that in which death is beckoning to some dear one, true and tried) become less supreme. There was a "catch" in her breath, but her face showed nothing of the anxiety that consumed her. If it had done so, however, her companion would not have observed it. Her thoughts, attracted for the moment by the sad domestic history to which she had just been listening, had already reverted to more personal affairs—not exactly her own affairs, though her own were bound up in them. Mary Marvon used a very rare—though, among women, a not unexampled—system of notation.

With her Number One was *not* always first, and was sometimes nought. She had every reason to believe, short of an actual offer of marriage, that Edgar Dornay purposed to make her his wife. She had liked him—even, perhaps, what is called fallen in love with him—from the first, but she had kept that fact carefully locked up in her own heart. She had given him no sort of encouragement, but had behaved to him exactly as she behaved to Mrs. Beckett's other visitors; not, indeed, with the humility often used by persons in her position, for nature had not fitted her for the conventional *role* of a "companion," but certainly with no forward assurance. On the contrary, she had put a constraint upon herself when in his company, and replied to him, whenever he had addressed her, with studied reticence. He had pushed aside this veil with his own hands, had sought her out, though with no demonstration of manner, in her modest retirement, and had won her heart.

He was not, however, quite sure that he had won it, nor had she quite made up her mind to give it to him. Her hesitation arose solely upon his own account. In one point of view—the most common one—she was without doubt a bad match for him. She could give him nothing but her love. Nay, as Mrs. Beckett had just been unconsciously pointing out, she might be not even a *plus* at all, but a *minus*. His union with her might take away from him certain opportunities. They did not present themselves to her in the precise form that they had appeared to her friend; she could not picture the man of her choice marrying for money, but she could understand that her poverty might be a check upon his advancement in life. His parents were dead, and he had no one but his own wishes to consult in the matter—unless Uncle Ralph might be considered in a paternal light, an idea which she rejected with some contempt. But this very freedom of choice increased her hesitation. It behooved her all the more not to take advantage of this uncontrolled attachment to his own hurt. What the world might say of it would be a very small thing to her in comparison with what her own conscience might say. It did not enter into her consideration at all—what Mrs. Beckett, on the other

hand, saw very clearly—that Edgar Dornay was of that impulsive and indecisive nature which needs, above all others, alliance with a firm, unwavering one; that a wife such as Mary Marvon would, in fact, to a young gentleman of his incompleteness, be “the making of him.” But, in spite of all her doubts, she had a secret conviction in her true heart that she could make him a happy man.

She was not so absolutely ignorant of human nature as to suppose this sort of love was reciprocated, but she believed that Edgar loved her as truly and unselfishly as man could do. It was most fortunate for her hostess that Mary was thus sunk in reflection, for with Edgar Dornay’s letter in her hand Mrs. Beckett felt very unequal to conversation. If her young friend had looked up at that critical moment with the very natural observation, for example, “Who is your correspondent?” one can hardly imagine what would have happened, though it is just possible, I fear, that she might have replied, “Only a bill, dear,” with the most innocent smile in the world.

Before conversation was resumed, however, the dressing-gong began to boom through the house, which afforded her an excuse for retreat with all the honors of truth.

CHAPTER VII.

A FOOL’S PARADISE.

EVEN in the seclusion of her own apartment the widow did not tear open her Edgar’s letter and greedily devour it with her eyes; nor, as a matter of fact, perhaps, is that course of action the usual one in such cases, except upon the stage, where one has to consider the conditions of distance—the gallery. In real life such treatment is only applied to telegrams. When a woman, especially, has a *billet-doux* in her hand, or what she hopes will prove one, she is in no hurry, however impatient may be her natural disposition, to become possessed of its contents; and this is more particularly the case when she has good reason to believe them to be agreeable.

That the check had not come back Mrs. Beckett had assured herself by the ordeal of touch ; her delicate fingers had weighed the missive and decided that it was too light to contain an enclosure. 'If her Edgar had kept the check she felt that he was secured to her, or, as brutal MAN would have expressed it, "sold ;" for, though she had urged his acceptance of it in any case, she knew that there was in reality no alternative for him.

As she gazed on his handwriting her thoughts reverted to the day, now thirty years ago, when her father had placed a similar letter in her hand, with the quiet remark, "This is from Sir Robert, my darling ; you will do as you please about it."

How different were her present feelings ! It seemed to her, as she compared her "now" and "then," that she could scarcely be the same woman. Her second offer had been made by word of mouth ; and how differently, again, had that proposal been received ! With what rapture had she heard it ! With what promise it had seemed to blossom, and how, alas, that blossom had withered ere it ever grew to bud ! She could not conceal from herself that there was no such blossom now ; yet if there was less to win—and there *was* less, much less—she on her part had less to lose.

"MY DEAR MRS. BECKETT, — Your kind letter has affected me beyond measure. I feel I am not worthy of your love, but I hope to become worthy of it. I am compelled to spend to-morrow at Brighton, but I shall be with you at three o'clock on Monday, when I shall trust to find you alone.

Ever yours, affectionately,

"EDGAR DOENAY.

"N.B.—Check received."

If the letter was not all that the widow could wish, it was, without doubt, an acceptance of her proposal ; if it did not fulfil her expectations, it removed from her all apprehensions of disappointment ; nay, it realized her hopes : but she didn't like his putting off his visit till Monday. Why should he not have come on Sunday ? Even supposing he had a previous engagement for that

day, why should he not have cancelled it? Was he not engaged to *her*? The notion of Mr. Edgar Dornay's having any conscientious scruples concerning Sunday did not, I regret to say, enter into her mind. What, however, she resented a great deal more was Edgar's postscript, "Check received," which seemed almost to have a double signification for her. Her first act, indeed, was to produce a pair of golden scissors—one of a set of implements fitted into a sea-shell, such as Aphrodite might have used at a marine Dorcas Society—and cut that neatly out. The note looked a little shorter, but much sweeter, without that little addition.

Mrs. Beckett had not only overlived her illusions, but had, what very few women possess, a due sense of proportion. She acknowledged to herself that, concerning the matter between herself and "another"—so her dividends expressed it—she had got decidedly the best of it. If Mr. Charles Sotheran—whom, to do her justice, she would have no more thought of as a husband than of marrying her grandson—had been in the place of Mr. Edgar Dornay, she would have taken a different view of the affair; the obligation would, in that case, have seemed to lie on the other side. His circumstances were such that, to use a homely but very significant expression, he might well have "jumped at" such an offer. But Edgar Dornay was well born, in possession of moderate means, and had made for himself a certain position in the world. She was not only very pleased that he had accepted her proposal, but grateful. It was impossible for him, of course, to speak of "terms," but she at once resolved that they should be made as much to his liking as possible. Her first idea—the idea of a woman in love, but one which fitted also with the natural generosity of her disposition—was to make him independent of her. And it was not enough for her to tell him her intentions; she wished to be able to assure him that they were already in process of being carried out. This was a notion that would never, of course, have entered into the head of a young girl; but in her case it had a certain pathos in it—it was a tacit confession that she knew she was not loved for herself alone. If the other reason for which he loved her should

be strengthened, would he not then love her more? There was, at least, nothing sordid in such an act of voluntary munificence.

She dashed off three lines to her man of business, Mr. Rennie, to request his attendance on her after breakfast on Monday morning: "Come to breakfast if you can," she added, impulsively, "though I am afraid our hour (9.30) will be a little late for you." Then she went down to dinner in the highest spirits.

There are some unphilosophic persons who do not much believe in the chastening influence of adversity; who confess that they are never so unsympathetic as when they are in low spirits, and that melancholy and moroseness are with them synonymous terms. We admire their candor, but pity the littleness of their minds. Still, it must be acknowledged that when folks are in good-luck they are more agreeable as companions than when they are depressed; kindly natures expand under the influence of good-fortune, and are very willing that their fellow-creatures should share, or at all events receive, the overplus of it. Mrs. Beckett had been always kind to her young companion, but never had she borne herself so warmly towards her as on the present occasion; in the familiarity of their conversation, when they had gone up to the drawing-room, she even ventured once more to hint at the subject of Mary's settling in life, though without any direct reference to the husband she had chosen for her.

"You are very young still, my dear, it is quite true; but age is relative; to a girl of fortune it is of small consequence, but to one with small means every year after she becomes marriageable is twelve months lost."

"I have never heard the value of time pointed out with such particularity," said Mary, smiling.

"My dear, I am quite serious; it is the fact," returned the widow, earnestly, "and I need not tell you, Mary, that whomsoever you may choose for a husband—though you know my especial wishes in that matter—I shall take care that you do not go to him without a dowry."

"You are very good and very kind," said Mary, with a faint flush; she was used to hints of the widow's intentions towards her, which had at first made her very un-

comfortable ; there was something in her nature which revolted against them, though she had found from experience that it was better to pass them lightly by. "But unless, my dear Mrs. Beckett, your generosity partakes of the nature of what Mr. Rennie was trying to explain to us the other day—a time bargain—or that you want to get rid of me as soon as possible—"

"Nay, nay," interrupted the widow, "you know I don't mean that." She was conscious, however—under the new conditions of her life that was to be—of having contemplated Mary's departure as a possibility. No idea of jealousy had crossed her mind, but it had occurred to her that when she became Mrs. Dornay, not only would Mary's office become a sinecure, but that there would be something embarrassing in her presence. In the case of turtle-doves, however roomy their nest may be, the happy pair, or the female, at all events, prefers it to be free from lodgers. "My house will always be your home, Mary, but circumstances may alter as regards myself—I may not be in a position—nobody knows what may happen."

The widow was in a quagmire, in which her struggles to escape only sank her the deeper ; she felt she had gone too far in hinting at any alteration in her mode of life, and she did not know how to erase the impression her words might have conveyed.

Mary, however, was quite innocent of all suspicion. She thought Mrs. Beckett was referring to the uncertainties of human life. "It will be long indeed, I hope, and have every reason to believe," she answered, earnestly, "before I have to come to any resolution on that account."

The widow bit her lip and was silent. It was possible, had Mary given her any encouragement, that she might have made a confidante of her then and there ; but under present circumstances that was out of the question. It was certainly very unpleasant that the idea of change in her condition had only associated itself in Mary's mind with her decease. She would take care to let Mr. Rennie understand that she had sent for him with quite other views than to give him her testamentary instructions.

"I know you hate to perform in public, Mary," she said, with some abruptness (it was the one thing in Mrs.

Beckett's manner which now and then betrayed the relative positions occupied by Miss Marvon and herself); "but since we are quite alone, perhaps you will play something on the piano."

It was an elastic request, and Mary took full advantage of it, for music was her delight. She played piece after piece, now grave, now gay, and at the end of each the widow murmured, "That is indeed a treat!" or "Thank you!" or "How charming!" But what was played was, in fact, only the accompaniment, more or less suitable, to her own thoughts.

When Mary's fingers evoked pathos Mrs. Beckett's mind reverted to her girlhood, so long past and gone; to the simple pleasures of her youth, and to its dreams; which, though great things had befallen her, had been far indeed from being realized. When the strain grew sombre her middle life passed once more before her, haunted by the ghost of love, and shadowed by a hated presence. When the tune was bright and joyous she painted her future in bright colors, and likened the remainder of her days to an Indian summer. But as to whether Beethoven was being played, or Mozart, or Chopin, the widow neither knew nor cared, so long as the notes were not so loud as to interfere with her own reflections. And so it is with a good many other people who affect to "dote on music."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. RENNIE'S INSTRUCTIONS.

THE next day was Sunday—a *dies non*; the day of all days—since in well-regulated establishments no work is permitted—on which suspense is intolerable. Again and again did Mrs. Beckett congratulate herself that she had taken time by the forelock and secured her Edgar's reply. How dreadful it would have been to have pictured him to herself at Brighton, ignorant of her devotion to him, and—it was really within the bounds of possibility—flirting

with somebody else ! Even as it was, the day was a very long one, and, contrary to her custom, she went twice to church, not so much, however, with the idea of special thanksgiving as of withdrawing her mind from its monopolizing topic. The preacher was eloquent and fashionable ; but it is doubtful whether he succeeded in producing in her that description of meditation which, above all others, should be "fancy free."

Contrary to the widow's expectations, Mr. Rennie arrived at the breakfast hour on Monday morning. The lawyer was a man of slight, almost insignificant, figure, young for his years, which were verging on sixty ; but with an astute and intelligent face. His eyes, blue and keen as a sword-blade, like it, were kept in scabbard until there was need for them. Their lids were usually pressed so close together that it was a wonder he saw out of them. The habit was ascribed to near-sightedness—an idea which he was very far from wishing to combat. The peculiarity had arisen, perhaps, in trick, but he had found it useful to him. When he heard things from his clients (and he sometimes did) which would have opened ordinary eyes very wide indeed, they only lifted his lashes a little. Nothing seemed to astonish him. On the other hand, he sometimes astonished others ; on occasions which demanded their exhibition, some folks knew that he could open his eyes to some purpose, when their effect was that of a policeman's bull's-eye suddenly turned on a detected thief. Mr. Rennie was an old bachelor, and his manners were of the old school of politeness ; his behavior to women, always kindly, but mingled with a certain respect, was quite different from the affected devotion displayed to them by men of fashion ; his ways with men were various, but he had a general reputation for something more than mere scrupulous integrity ; a man of honor first and a lawyer afterwards. His business was mainly confined to the affairs of great families, and the administration of large estates ; but he had been known to give valuable advice to persons of comparative insignificance, and, what was more, in a very unprofessional manner—without a fee. Mrs. Beckett adored him, and told him so ; just a little to his alarm. A woman who had buried two hus-

bands was, he thought, capable of reverting to first principles in the way of matrimony, and of capturing the third by force. But, on the whole, he liked her; and not least for her treatment of Mary Marvon. He had seen a great deal of the dependents of the great, and they did not impress him favorably; but in this young lady he recognized modesty without subservience, and an unflinching self-respect.

"This is a compliment indeed, Mr. Rennie," were the widow's first words of welcome. "I never thought you would come to breakfast."

"It is almost as dangerous to give an invitation, madam, under the impression that it will not be accepted," was his reply, "as to back a bill under the contrary impression. You seem to have made every preparation, however, for my entertainment."

"There are some outlets and fish: oh, I see what you mean; why, of course, there is Mary." The lawyer was shaking hands with her with something more than his usual politeness. "I know you would never dare to take breakfast with me alone. Under pretence of being my chaperon, or sheep-dog, every one knows that Mary is here for the protection of the public."

"*Quis custodiet?*" murmured the lawyer, with a glance of pity towards the orphan girl.

"What do you say, sir?" inquired the widow, sharply. "I always suspect the dead languages."

"I was merely quoting a legal phrase, my dear madam, with reference to the custody of infants. By-the-bye, I have been having some correspondence with our friend Mr. Paton that would surprise you. What do you think of an infant nine feet high?"

"The giant! Oh, we've heard of him," exclaimed Mary, laughing.

"Well, he's a minor; and since it was through Mr. Paton's advice that he threw up his engagement, my client thinks he is responsible for his future. As he shakes the pillars of domestic peace at the Hall—and, indeed, the Hall too—it has become necessary to place him somewhere else, and I have been offering premiums to proprietors of travelling-shows to take him. Never was a

respectable family solicitor placed in such a false position."

"The mention of Mr. Rennie's profession, Mary," observed the widow, "which nobody, I am sure, would ever guess, unless he referred to it—"

"Now, do you really expect me to take that as a compliment, Mrs. Beckett?" interposed the lawyer.

"The mention of his profession," continued the widow, "reminds me that he has come here professionally, and that I must deny myself the pleasure of your company this morning; but you can have the carriage, of course, as usual."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Beckett, but I had much rather walk."

"Then take Simmons with you, I beg, my dear: you are much too young and pretty to go without a maid."

"I would much prefer Alexander," said Mary.

"Now did you ever know such a girl, Mr. Rennie?" exclaimed the widow, appealingly. "She prefers walking to driving, and the company of Alexander to that of Simmons."

"It depends upon who Alexander is," observed the lawyer, judicially. "If he's an attractive young man—"

"It is a dog, my dear sir; it's Mr. Beckett's old St. Bernard."

"Oh, indeed! One of those animals who go about with a bottle of Chartreuse—no, by-the-bye, that's the other monastery—of brandy round their necks, and save people in the snow. In winter a most admirable companion, but in summer I should have thought—"

"He is charming at all times," laughed Mary, rising from her seat; "I've not had a walk with him for weeks, so that we shall have lots to say to one another."

And, with a pretty courtesy and a pleasant smile, she left the seniors to their conversation.

"That's a good girl, I'm sure," observed the lawyer, when the young lady had left the room.

"An excellent girl," assented Mrs. Beckett, warmly; "she is quite like a younger sister to me."

"Without the little jealousies and antagonisms which relations sometimes give rise to, eh?" observed Mr. Rennie, slyly.

"Upon my word, you're as bad as Mr. Paton," exclaimed the widow. "I suppose that is why you lawyers get such a bad character: you mix with such queer clients and catch their complaints."

"Yes, that's it. We go about doing good at all risks."

"Well, I want you to do some good to-day; or rather to put me, as your client, in the way of doing it. I particularly wish to benefit a certain person—who shall remain nameless, if you please, for the present—pecuniarily. I wish that person, though closely connected with me, to be made independent of me, no matter what may happen as regards change of circumstances, or even of feeling, in myself."

"A very generous proposition," observed the lawyer, stirring his tea, and thinking to himself, "Now she is going to provide for that young girl. A very good thing, too. Companionship is no inheritance, and one woman's affection for another is never to be depended on: though it looks as firm as the solid earth, there is always a possibility of a land-slip."

As Mrs. Beckett remained silent, he looked up at her through his screwed-up eyes and nodded encouragement. The widow was blushing, and pursuing a peach-stone across her plate with a trembling finger—a sign of embarrassment which by no means astonished the lawyer. People, in his experience, were generally more ashamed of their benevolent intentions, especially if they were of a Quixotic character, than of their revenges.

"A highly laudable idea," he continued, "if one is only assured, which, no doubt, you are in this case, of the worthiness of the individual to be benefited."

"I have every confidence in the person in question, Mr. Rennie. Perhaps, without beating about the bush, it may be as well to state to you, of course in the strictest confidence, that the person I have in my mind is my future husband."

For the moment Mr. Rennie forgot his office and even himself. He opened his eyes to their fullest extent, not in reproof, as usual, but in sheer amazement.

"Alexander has gone out with Miss Marvon," said the widow, severely.

"Alexander, my dear madam?" stammered the other.

"Yes—the dog. I thought you whistled, sir." And, indeed, it was true that the least ghost of a whistle had somehow escaped from the old lawyer's lips.

"Good heavens, madam! nothing was further from my thoughts. It is no whistling matter."

"So I should hope," returned the widow, implacably. She was very much offended.

"Thank Heaven, it isn't me; that's one comfort," was the lawyer's reflection, which assisted him in summoning a gentle smile.

"If I have exhibited any amazement, my dear Mrs. Beckett," he said, "it was from the consideration of your great courage and confidence in human nature."

"I think I am old enough to know my own mind, Mr. Rennie."

"I don't know as to that. A woman, they say, is as old as she looks—in which case I must needs doubt your judgment."

"I am glad you have something civil to say at last."

"Civil! My dear Mrs. Beckett, you must be well aware that my feelings towards you are not those of a mere acquaintance, or even such as should exist between lawyer and client."

"You would not have dared to say that ten minutes ago," smiled the widow, who had by this time recovered not only her self-possession, but her good-humor; from which it may be gathered that she was not absolutely impervious to flattery.

"Well, I dare to say it now, and something more. On one occasion, when I had had the opportunity of being of service to you, you were graciously pleased to call me your guardian."

"I went further, and said 'guardian angel,'" put in Mrs. Beckett, frankly, but with a tinge of color. He was referring to a certain time when his advice had restrained her from placing what would have been a most ill-judged confidence in her late husband.

"As your friend and well-wisher, at all events," pursued the lawyer, modestly, "it is my duty now to point out to you that your position is a very exceptional one. The

gentleman you have in your mind you will make not only your husband, but a prince consort."

"And how do you know that he is not a prince already?" inquired the widow, smiling.

The question was a little embarrassing, for the man Mr. Rennie had in his mind was certainly not a prince, nor at all like one, being, in fact, no other than Mr. Ralph Dornay. He knew that he was intimate at the house, and thought him just the sort of calculating humbug to have learned the length of Mrs. Beckett's foot.

"If he had been a prince I think you would have called him a personage, and not a person," returned the lawyer, dexterously.

"He is a prince to me," said the widow, gently; "to us women all men seem so while they are our lovers."

"I suppose they do," observed the lawyer, dryly. He was considering whether, even to his betrothed, Mr. Ralph Dornay could appear to possess any princely attributes.

"This is a matter, Mr. Rennie," continued the widow, stung by his cynical tone, "in which I have no need of advice, except professionally. My mind is quite made up as to the main question."

The lawyer bowed, and took a pinch of snuff; it was the only vice of which he had ever been accused—or, at least, convicted.

"I am here, my dear madam, to obey your instructions. You wish, as I understand, that this fortunate gentleman should enjoy a handsome life interest in your estate."

"That is of course. It is the usual arrangement, is it not?"

"It is a common one, but by no means without exception. In such a case as yours, a woman's fortune is settled upon her and her children; but, if she wishes it, a sufficient income is reserved to her husband should he survive her."

"Well, you can draw up the settlement; but I wish a certain sum to be given absolutely to my husband on the day of our marriage—£50,000."

"My dear Mrs. Beckett!"

"Such are my wishes; be so good as to embody them in—I don't know how to express myself technically—but I know what I want to have done."

Mr. Rennie smiled as though he had no doubt of that.

"I suppose, as regards the lump sum, a deed of gift will be necessary?" continued the widow.

"Not at all. There will be certain preliminary arrangements, and then you have only to sign a check."

The widow's eyes sparkled with pleasure. To place a check for £50,000 in the hands of her intended would be, she felt, an enormous pleasure to her.

"A draft of your instructions shall be prepared for your approval," resumed the lawyer, who had no intention of precipitating matters. "Is there anything—or any one else—you wish to mention."

Since checks for £50,000 were flying about, it struck the kind-hearted lawyer that Mary Marvon might well be brought to his client's remembrance before. Mr. Ralph Dornay came into his kingdom, after which her chance would be small indeed.

"No," said the widow, thoughtfully. "Nothing else occurs to me. You will not be long about it, I conclude; it is all so very simple."

"Very," assented the lawyer, without moving a muscle; but his eyes, if he had been so foolish as to open them, would have betrayed the satire.

"Then it could be done at once—in half an hour?"

"What? The deed? The settlement?" The idea of despatch is to a lawyer always hateful; but the suggestion of tying-up a property like Mrs. Beckett's—as if it had been a brown-paper parcel—in half an hour, sounded to Mr. Rennie like a blasphemy in the ears of a bishop.

"I don't mean that, but I should like to have a note of my intentions drawn out in a proper manner, for my own satisfaction."

"What she means," said the lawyer to himself, "is for private exhibition. She thinks it will bring the tears into the eyes of that specious humbug, whereas it will only make his mouth water. My dear madam, what a fool you are about to make of yourself! It is curious, when nature has done her very best almost in that way, how some folks will improve upon it." Then he added aloud, "You shall have a note of your instructions before your luncheon hour, Mrs. Beckett."

He named that time because he felt sure that if the man she had in her mind was Mr. Ralph Dornay he would come to lunch ; but he was not quite certain that he was the man. A curiosity very foreign to his character impelled him, as he took his leave, to learn her secret.

"I suppose it would be indiscreet in me, dear Mrs. Beckett, to hazard a guess as to the subject of our conversation this morning?"

"It would be indiscreet in me to tell," said the widow, smiling ; which, indeed, considering that no word of love had passed her Edgar's lips, it certainly would have been.

"If I was to say that the name of the unknown began with a D and ended with a Y, should I be very far wrong?"

"You would be getting 'warm,' sir, as the children say at 'hide-and-seek,'" returned the widow, blushing. "I need say no more than that." And she held out her hand.

Mr. Rennie took and pressed it kindly, but he did not utter one word of congratulation. He thought his client very foolish ; but also that she was about to bring upon herself a greater punishment than her folly deserved.

Mrs. Beckett was well satisfied with his silence ; in a case like hers she knew enough of the world to be grateful for small mercies. It was something—nay, it was a good deal—that so old a friend and adviser had not dropped a word about the disparity of years. She had not the faintest suspicion of the cause which made any such remarks an impossibility. Her mind was full of her Edgar, and she concluded that of Mr. Rennie was preoccupied with the same individual. If she had told him the truth it is probable that the lawyer would have known better than to attempt remonstrance, but a certain line in the Table of Forbidden Degrees in the Prayer-book would certainly have suggested itself—"A man may not marry his grandmother."

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

THE Aglaia, in Piccadilly, is one of those luxurious establishments for the suppression of marriage, called clubs, which lets its upper floor in apartments to members. Those who are so fortunate as to secure them need never step out-of-doors in search of domestic comfort. After eating and drinking and smoking—nay, even reading, if their tastes are so exceptional as to lead them to literature—a pass-key opens a private door for them on the second floor, and they have only to go up to bed. “Home is home, no matter how homely;” and the sitting-room and two bedrooms rented by the Messrs. Dornay, uncle and nephew, above their club, were as much their home as though they possessed a house in the neighboring square. Indeed, as to decoration, these three apartments were by no means homely, while the sitting-room was furnished with great luxury. Some of the treasures of Cliffe Park, too precious to be left to the tender mercies of tenants, had been imported into it, and the taste of Mr. Edgar Dornay had supplied whatever had been wanting to its original embellishment.

To the ordinary eye, however, nothing would have seemed to be wanting, from Cliffe Park or anywhere else; for the Aglaia Club, though the beauty of its architecture was disputed (and what is *not* disputed in architecture?), was famous for its fittings. Everything was so mellow and subdued and harmonious that, if mellowness and subjugation and harmony can effect one half of what is ascribed to them upon the human soul, all the members of the Aglaia Club would have been as sure of paradise as a Crusader who had killed a Paynim, or *vice versa*. On the other hand, notwithstanding these elegant surroundings, these gentlemen could scarcely be set down as spiritually minded, nor, indeed, did they concern themselves

much with paradise at all. They were mostly golden, or, more accurately, gilded youths, who resembled lilies less in their purity than in their exemption from toil; for, when folks are idle, it is my firm conviction that not all the sage-green furniture in the world will keep them out of mischief.

In some cases these gilded youths were not very youthful, and in others they had rubbed some of their gilt off.

Mr. Ralph Dornay suffered from both these disadvantages more than people were generally aware of, for, to do him justice, he was a man of courage, nay, of dauntless audacity, and could hold his head up like a man where another would have held it down through consciousness of not being worthy of that title; one of great resource and of some ingenuity, fit to breast the blows of circumstance and grapple with his evil star if Fate so desired it, and very apt to take advantage of his opportunities when she chanced to be in a better humor.

Sometimes he even made opportunities for himself. A great idea had been shaping itself in his mind of late, or, rather, had suddenly been born there, perfected and complete, as Pallas sprang from the brain of Jove. It was a magnificent conception, the result of which might place him above the aspirations of ambition, but one that was proportionally difficult to carry out. It was not only that there were obstacles in the way, huge as a mountain and as solid, but that his plan required a total change of front in his own views and proceedings. Hitherto he had been a mere satellite of his nephew, content to shine with a very modest lustre in the same firmament, and, upon the whole, a faithful satellite. His best advice, according to his lights, had been always at Edgar's service, and in some things he had given him material aid, not, indeed, from affection, nor even from that tie of blood on which he so much insisted, but because their interests were identical. But now he had it in his mind to be no more a satellite, but a sun, with a system of its own. At present, however, as regarded the attainment of his object he had no system whatever, but only an audacious and well-nigh desperate resolve; it was necessary to feel his way, and with all the more caution, since on some portion of it he would have to retrace his steps.

It was the evening of the day on which Edgar Dornay had accepted Mrs. Beckett's offer, and uncle and nephew were alone together in their private apartment. They had not met since they had lunched together in Park Lane, the younger man having dined out, and the elder at the club, as was usual in both cases. The former had donned his dressing-gown and slippers, but the latter was in full evening panoply. Uncle Ralph was not often seen in dishabille—not because that process of “breaking up” had by any means begun with him with which most of us, when our ship is no longer classed A1, are acquainted, and which men are often quite as solicitous to conceal as are the softer sex, but because he felt the danger, at his age, of once giving way to slovenly habits. He was as fond of ease as most people—nay, fonder—but in his present circumstances he did not consider that he could afford to take it. His attire, though quite as faultless and more equable—he was never seen in dittos even in September—was not so splendid as that of some members of the Aglaia, and remembering, perhaps, the dictum of the poet—

“What are myrtles and wreaths to the brow that is wrinkled?”—

he seldom had a flower in his button-hole. On the present occasion, however, he wore a sprig of stephanotis, which attracted his companion's attention.

“What! two flowers in one day in your coat, Ralph! You must be going to be married.”

“The first one, my dear Edgar,” returned Uncle Ralph, slowly expelling the smoke of his cigar from his lips, and nodding towards the mantel-piece, on which Mary's rose was blushing in a wine-glass, as though ashamed of the association, “can hardly be considered my own; I look upon it as having been given in trust.”

“How so?” inquired the other, with a tinge of color in his cheek which did not escape his companion's notice.

“Well, I hardly think Miss Marvon would have given me anything of her own free-will. Moreover, her choice was peculiar. You know the signification of the common rose, no doubt?”

“I heard you say it was ‘true love,’” said Edgar, with a touch of incredulous contempt.

“That was to spare your feelings. Its true meaning is ‘Love’s ambassador.’ If you yourself are not learned in the language of flowers, Miss Marvon is, you may depend upon it.”

“I don’t believe Miss Marvon ever gave her attention to anything so foolish,” said Edgar, with irritation.

“You ought to know best,” returned the other, shrugging his shoulders. “I admit that there is as little doubt of her sagacity as of her beauty; but she is a woman, and, being so, must needs have her little weaknesses.”

“You have insisted upon them often enough, and called them by a worse name,” remarked his companion, dryly.

“Yes, I own I have been prejudiced, but, really, her sweetness and gentleness made a convert of me this afternoon. *Peccavi!*”

“What the devil do you mean?” exclaimed the young man, sharply. “Why, it was only the other day you told me her tongue was like a whip.”

“So it was—to me. But when she speaks of some one else who bears the same name, it is a privilege to listen to her. Her lips drop honey. As for me, I fairly threw down my arms to-day, and owned myself vanquished. ‘I confess, my dear Miss Marvon,’ I said, ‘that hitherto I have been in opposition to you, but henceforth I am your ally; you may rely on me to advance your interests and your wishes in every way in my power.’”

“And what did she say to all that?”

“I had hoped you would not have asked me,” said Uncle Ralph, in an injured tone; “she told me that she had no confidence whatever in my protestations, and that as for my alliance, she didn’t care one half-penny whether I was her ally or her enemy—or words to that effect.”

“A brave girl! an honest girl!” murmured the young man, admiringly. “Dear, dear!” he sighed, “what a happy world this would be if one could only do as one liked in it!”

“Now, really, Edgar, you astonish me!” returned the other, with raised eyebrows. “I should have thought that was the very condition under which you had accepted existence. May I ask what you have ever done that you didn’t like?”

"Well, for one thing, I lost £500 at Ascot."

"True," replied Uncle Ralph, sententiously; "that was certainly a miscarriage of justice. Still, it is not an overwhelming misfortune."

"You would have found it deucedly inconvenient, Ralph, if it had happened to *you*."

To this observation, as being absolutely indisputable, Uncle Ralph made no reply. "As to the turf," he observed, "whether one has £50 a year or £50,000, the end is the same to everybody who goes in for it. If you would only resolve to give up betting, my dear Edgar, every other pleasure would lie within your grasp. You have a very tolerable income. Although I have often advised you to marry money, I am not sure whether in your case an economical wife without a dowry would not in the end be cheaper to you than a rich one who had been brought up—as they all are—in habits of extravagance. It is not as if you would have to live on bread and cheese."

"This is quite a new view of affairs," said Edgar, scornfully.

"I know it; I have confessed as much, and how I have been converted. Moreover, this Ascot business put *this* in my mind: perhaps, if my nephew married the girl he loved, and who will be absolutely dependent on him, he would consent to give up for her sake a dangerous habit, which he will never forego for his own. With her he is secure of happiness, if he will only be content with that; and how few of us are able to look forward to such a future."

"How strange it is," returned the other, with quiet scorn, "that a man of your age, Uncle Ralph, and who knows that it is deadly to you, *will* continue to take champagne at dinner, and such lots of it!"

A quick, uneasy smile flitted over his companion's face. "No, Edgar, I am quite sober, and very serious; nay, in sackcloth and ashes. I am afraid I have done mischief to you through meaning well. In one matter, at least, and a most important one, I have hitherto used what little influence I may be so fortunate as to have with you for evil and not for good. It is not pleasant to have to eat one's words, but I believe I have been all wrong about Miss Marvon."

"Your repentance, like that of most people, Uncle Ralph," replied the young man, gravely, "comes a little too late."

"How so? How can it be too late?" put in the other, quickly; "why, it is not six hours ago since Miss Marvon herself—"

"Very likely," interrupted the young man, with a forced smile; "but to the other party interested—the humble individual who is now addressing you—something has happened within those same six hours. In point of fact, my dear fellow, I am going to be married to Mrs. Beckett."

Uncle Ralph's cigar dropped from his lips, and lay unheeded where it fell, on the delicate carpet.

"Impossible! Incredible! You cannot be really serious, Edgar?"

"It is as true as I sit here. It need not astonish you, so far as the widow is concerned. I am not so vain or so base as to boast of such things, but you must surely have observed that she had a *tendresse* for me."

"A *tendresse*! I know, of course, she liked you—looked upon you with maternal affection." Edgar shook his head and screwed up his mouth; then, observing the look of genuine disgust on his companion's face, he burst out into a peal of laughter.

"If it's a joke," said Uncle Ralph, "I'll laugh with you, Edgar, and welcome. If you really mean that you are thinking of marrying Mrs. Beckett—"

"I am not thinking of it, I *have* thought of it," put in the other, "and I am going to do it."

"Then you're going to disgrace yourself, Edgar, and the honor of the family."

"As to the family, Uncle Ralph," was the quiet reply, "I know no one belonging to it, except yourself, for whose opinion I care one farthing."

"There are the dead, Edgar," answered the other, impressively; "your long line of illustrious ancestors are not, I hope, to be put altogether out of account."

"What a marvellous humbug, you are, Ralph! You are like the card-sharper who, through long practice, could deceive himself in his own looking-glass when prac-

tising his sleight-of-hand tricks. From continually maun-dering about the Dornay blood, you have got to persuade yourself that there is something in it different from that of other people."

"I venture to think there is," returned Uncle Ralph.

"Very good; stick to your theory, for all I care; but don't try to force it down the throat of your connections, who know better. Keep it for the general public. And another thing I must request of you—not to talk to me about my disgracing myself. I am the best judge of my own actions and intentions, and I will submit to neither reproof nor dictation from any human being!"

The young man had risen from his chair, and, striding from one end of the room to the other, delivered these words with much fire and fury.

"If I said disgrace, Edgar, I withdraw the word," said the other, gently; "my affection and respect for you must be my excuse for my warmth of expression. What I shrank from was the contemplation of such self-sacrifice. That you, with your social position, your talents, your youth, should thus throw all your advantages to the winds; it is pitiful, my dear Edgar, it is pitiful!"

Uncle Ralph regarded his nephew with the same sort of regretful admiration that an aunt might entertain for a niece who had announced her intention of becoming an old man's darling. "So young, so fair," he seemed to be saying to himself, "how is it possible that you can thus sell yourself to this comparatively ancient personage?"

"I have very good reasons for the step I am about to take," said Edgar, mollified in spite of himself by this high estimate of his personal value.

"Thirty thousand of them per annum," suggested Uncle Ralph, dryly. "Still, there is a saying that one may buy even money too dearly. And it won't be *your* money to do what you like with, my poor fellow."

"That is my affair, Ralph; though, indeed, I have every confidence in Mrs. Beckett's consideration and generosity."

"Still, it is more than likely that her hands are tied."

"Nonsense! it is well known that Mrs. Beckett has entire control of her income. Not that *I* should want that,

as her late husband did, Heaven knows. The man was a greedy, ill-conditioned brute."

"Oh, I don't question that she will find you a much more agreeable consort," put in Uncle Ralph. "There is not the least fear of your suffering from any unpleasant comparisons. But what was Mr. Beckett's happy fate as respects finance may not be yours. Sir Peter may have left his widow free to marry once, but not a second time."

"Pooh! that's ridiculous."

"Nevertheless, before committing yourself it would be worth while to look at Sir Peter's will. If it's too much trouble, just ask young Sotheran, who is at the Probate Office, to look the thing up."

"Sotheran be hanged!" exclaimed Edgar. The irritation in his tone did not escape the keen ear of his companion, who had by this time recovered both his equanimity and his cigar.

"Just as you please, my dear boy; but if I were in your place I would do nothing in a hurry in this matter. There is plenty of time before you, at all events."

"The matter is done, Ralph. The widow—" Here he stopped, for, with all his faults, Edgar Dornay was too much of a gentleman to expose a woman who loved him to ridicule, as would certainly have been the case had he told the true story of his engagement. "I have already proposed to Mrs. Beckett, and have had the good-fortune to be accepted."

"Not in writing, Edgar?" inquired the other, eagerly. "Surely not in writing?"

"Yes, in writing."

"I never heard of anything so ill-judged and infatuated in my life!" cried Uncle Ralph, taking his handkerchief from his breast and passing it across his face. There was no doubt about the genuineness of his emotion; though he did not shed tears, the dew was literally upon his face. "How could you, *could* you, thus wreck all your prospects in life?"

"One would think I was a novice taking the veil," observed Edgar, grimly. "Your tone and manner would scarcely be justified if I were a boy of twenty and Mrs. Beckett were threescore years and ten."

"But what on earth could have induced you to do it, my poor Edgar?"

"Well, I acted from mixed motives; it was done on the spur of the moment."

"Ah, you were intoxicated by the contemplation of her charms!"

"You will be so good as to remember, Ralph," observed the young man, sharply, "that we are speaking of my future wife."

"True. Pardon me. The whole thing is so like a dream—a nightmare—that I forgot it was reality. But what was the reason of this sudden resolve of yours? Was it gratitude?"

"Possibly—that is to say, in part."

"She has laid you, then, under some pecuniary obligation. Oh, Edgar, Edgar, why did you not come to me?"

"What would have been the good of it? You couldn't have given me a check for £500 I suppose; and how were my Ascot debts to be settled?"

"Five hundred pounds! Do you mean to say you have sold yourself for £500?" Uncle Ralph started to his feet with a speed of which one would have supposed him incapable. He drew a key from his pocket, opened his desk, and, taking out his banking book, pitched it into his nephew's lap. "I have more than £2000 there, as you can see for yourself, only awaiting investment, to which you are as welcome, my lad, as flowers in May."

"You are very kind, most kind, Ralph," said Edgar, gently; "perhaps, if I had known about it before I might have been your debtor. I had thought you were as hard up—at least for ready money—as myself."

Uncle Ralph looked a little embarrassed; he had certainly not sought the reputation of being the sort of man who has £2000 lying idle at his banker's.

"I kept the money there for a purpose which no longer exists," he explained; "for an emergency that has passed away. Pray take it, or what you need of it."

"It is too late," answered Edgar, with a sigh. "Mrs. Beckett would, indeed, have a right to complain of me if I withdrew my offer because the necessity which impelled me to make it had ceased to exist. Indeed, I am wrong to

speak of necessity in the matter; I again repeat that I had mixed motives. I like Mrs. Beckett very much."

"I am afraid, my dear Edgar, that there is another woman who, in the event of this mad marriage, will also have a right to complain."

"You didn't think so yesterday," returned the young man, scornfully.

"Yes, I did, yesterday afternoon, when I heard her speaking about you unreservedly for the first time. Poor, dear Miss Marvon!"

Edgar Dornay's brow grew very dark.

"You, at least," he answered, vehemently, "have no right to taunt me about Miss Marvon; nor will I listen to another word as regards my conduct towards her from your lips. It is enough to feel that one has behaved dishonorably, without being preached at by those who are no better than ourselves."

To this somewhat pointed remark a slight elevation of his broad shoulders was all the reply that Uncle Ralph ventured to make.

"We shall meet at breakfast to-morrow morning, I conclude," he said, as he lit his bedroom candle.

"No; I breakfast out."

"In Park Lane, I suppose?"

"No; I shall not make my appearance there till Monday, at three o'clock."

He did not think it necessary to mention that he was going to Brighton on the morrow till Monday, and would be out of the reach of his companion's arguments for the next six-and-thirty hours.

As Uncle Ralph opened his bedroom door he turned and said, with a slight smile, "There is somebody who will say of this that 'it is an ill wind that blows nobody good.' Mr. Charles Sotheran—or Charley, as Miss Marvon calls him—will now have the field all to himself."

"Mary will never marry Sotheran!" cried Edgar, vehemently.

"Why not?" inquired Ralph, with simplicity.

"Because—because—why, because, of course, she doesn't care for him."

"Nay; you mean that at present she would not marry

him because she doesn't care for him so much as for you. If No. 1 marries some one else, of course she will fall back on No. 2. However, that is her affair, and one of very small consequence in comparison with other matters. Good-night, my dear fellow."

Having shot that Parthian shaft, Uncle Ralph closed his bedroom door. If what happened to Mary, inclusive, even, of her possible union with Charley, was of small consequence to the speaker, it seemed to be of some moment to his nephew. His lips were absolutely pale with rage, and he muttered words concerning the probate clerk which, if set down in a will, would have invalidated it, as evidencing madness in the testator. No argument which Uncle Ralph had hitherto hit upon had had such weight with him as that parting arrow loosed at random. It had gone home to the young man's very heart, and the barb was rankling in the wound.

CHAPTER X.

♦ "I SUPPOSE IT MUST BE 'YES.'"

SOME apology seems owing that so very prominent a member of the Park Lane household as the Emperor Alexander has not as yet been introduced to the reader. But the fact is, his title, through the affability of his manners, had long fallen into desuetude, and of late years—that is, since the death of his late master—he had been confined to the ground-floor apartments, and was seldom seen. The dog, a magnificent St. Bernard, had been a great favorite with Mr. Beckett—almost the only creature besides himself, I think, which that tipping civil-engineer had any regard for; and in his time he had wandered over the house at will. Nothing was further from his mind than mischief; one look at his thoughtful eyes and massive head would have convinced you he was incapable of it; but in the drawing-room, crowded as it was with costly knick-knacks, he did, with his colossal tail, a good deal of involuntary damage. The "Brush system," as

Charley said, is an admirable one if you only have it under control ; but this was not the case with that of Alexander. It worked incessantly, and with great power, but to no useful purpose. On the contrary, it was destructive. Like his great namesake of old, his path was marked with devastation, but, unlike the imperial madman, he meant no harm. How could the poor animal know what was going on behind him ?

His heart, like his frame, was a noble one ; there was but one blot in his character—fidelity to his former master. This, however, was an error of race ; the dog is to be won by fear, but the cat never—a circumstance which, if there were no other urgent reason for it, would always place the cat above the dog, in my opinion. So far, however, as his lights could guide him, Alexander was perfection. His mistress was rather set against him, as she averred, because of his behavior towards her blue china, though I suspect that was not the real explanation of her coldness ; but Mary Marvon adored him, and her affection was reciprocated. She liked nothing better than a walk in the Park with Alexander for her sole companion ; he enjoyed it equally, and, when once his first manifestations of delight—which resembled the gambols of some hairy elephant with his trunk at the wrong end of him—were over, in a no less sober fashion. Instead of being the “off-and-on companion of her walks,” as Wordsworth’s dog was, he stuck to her like Una’s lion, and would not have deserted his charge even to fight a unicorn. As to other dogs, he ignored their very existence. He never made any excursions of curiosity into the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdoms, but trotted by her side with a majestic slouch, deaf to every call but that of duty. If another dog forced itself on his attention—a very rare occurrence, except with bull-dogs—he never bit them, nor so much as opened his mouth ; he literally fell upon them and crushed their breath out. Those who had any pride left in them accounted to their friends for their flattened condition by ascribing it to a steam-roller.

On the morning of Mr. Rennie’s visit, Mary Marvon and her four-footed friend took their way across the Park to the Serpentine. It was their favorite walk ; Mary enjoyed

the brightness and beauty of the scene, liked to see the children sailing their toy boats and feeding the ducks, and all the stir of innocent enjoyment. The Emperor Alexander took a gracious interest in the water-dogs, and had a secret curiosity, which his sense of dignity forbade him to gratify, to discover if they were web-footed. Mary's pet standpoint—for she always lingered a minute there—was the bridge by Kensington Gardens, which has a view to northward equal in beauty and superior in extent to that from the bridge in St. James's Park. To the south there is a still finer prospect, if the eye can only avoid that equestrian image of the Duke of Wellington, which makes one wish that Fame were indeed a bubble, and could evanesce without enduring brass. She is gazing now on the shining water and the stately trees, but her heart is far from them. She has only to say one little word, as she believes, and it will be farther still—in another's keeping.

With young ladies of the present day—those, at least, who permit themselves to love at all, who are said to be in a minority—it is the fashion, as Douglas did with the heart of Bruce, to throw that organ before them and follow it into the fray. They flatter themselves that, having risked so tremendous a stake, they must needs evoke a declaration and win their lover. Such a practice is doubtless a spur to exertion, but it has its drawbacks and its dangers. In my opinion it is more maidenly to wait till they have answered "Yes" to a very important question. Mary Marvon was of this opinion; her heart was still her own, but it roved, and took short swallow flights from home—how could she help it?—in the direction of Edgar Dornay.

She was thinking over what Mrs. Beckett had said to her the previous day: no doubt it would be to her advantage to marry the man she loved, but that was the very reason which gave her pause. It is well to look closely into any course which is recommended to us by inclination and our own interests. The question with her was, would her marriage with Edgar Dornay be to *his* advantage? She knew that his present life was a luxurious one; and, though she credited him with certain genuine qualities, the notion of his possessing which, in those who knew him better, would have evoked a smile, she doubted

of his fitness for a life-long "day of small things;" an existence mitigated by cheap and infrequent pleasures, and flawed by economies and acts of self-denial. At times she even thought she had noticed in him aspirations after great wealth, or, at all events, an admiration of it. She was not so foolish as to imagine that three months after marriage he would be as much in love with her as he professed to be at present; but her beauty was not her sheet-anchor, as it is with so many girls. She had some hope that by that time he would have learned to love her for what she had in her of true worth.

For Mary Marvon, though portionless and almost friendless, was much too honest to hold herself worthless; in her heart of hearts she believed herself worthy of Edgar's love, and would have done so had he been as rich as Mrs. Beckett—not that she exaggerated her own merits, but because she was little more impressed by mere money than her four-footed companion.

"Wough! wough!" said Alexander, who was looking through the balustrade by the side of his mistress, and had recognized an acquaintance upon the south side of the lake. It was a hoarse murmur rather than a growl; but it was not a note of welcome. It seemed to say, "There's a person I don't much care about coming towards us yonder; but since you know him perhaps it's as well to mention the fact."

Mary, who understood Alexander quite well, looked in the direction of his gaze, and at once perceived its object.

The "person" was Edgar Dornay, handsome even in the morning, but whose bright, intelligent face, or what she could see of it, for his head was bent, was fuller of thought than usual. At the sight of him her heart gave a quick jump, her cheeks became suffused with a sudden glow, and the light leaped into her eyes; for the moment, love, taking advantage of her solitude—for, as it happened, there was no other passenger on the bridge—had asserted itself. The next moment she was herself again; but, if she could have looked into the young man's mind, she would have despised herself for that momentary weakness. He was thinking of the momentous interview that was to take place that afternoon at Beckett House, and of

the conversation he had held on the Saturday night with his uncle. That gentleman, as we know, had failed to turn him from his purpose, but his arguments had been by no means without their effect, and he shrank from any recapitulation of them. He had not seen his relative since he returned from Brighton, and did not intend to see him (though there was an opportunity of doing so, since Uncle Ralph always lunched at his club) till he had seen the widow. His best chance, he felt, of carrying out his plan was to see him no more till it was completed, or till he had asked Mrs. Beckett, *in propria persona*, to marry him, and been formally accepted. And, above all, until this was done it was his intention to keep clear of Mary Marvon.

Every word Ralph had spoken concerning her had had a barb in it; and what his uncle had said was as nothing compared with the gnawings of his own thoughts, the sense of cowardice and falsehood and shame, and, above all, the consciousness of loss. For in his own way Edgar Dornay loved the girl, shrank from losing her, and was rendered desperate by the thought of another possessing her. When she was by his side she was all in all to him; but apart from her, or, as he grossly expressed it to himself, when "in his sober senses," he loved other things better—such as luxury and pleasure and ease. He had never made Mary an offer, but he had meant to do it, and he felt that she knew he meant it. He believed that he had won her heart, or rather, stolen it; since it now turned out it was gained under false pretences, and that after to-day she would regard him as a thief and a liar.

In comparison with this reflection, all other drawbacks in connection with the widow faded into nothing; if her age had been doubled and her income halved, and his conduct to Mary Marvon could only have been blotted out, his condition would have been preferable to what it was at that moment. How could he ever hold up his head in her presence and meet her reproachful eyes? He foresaw that her first act on learning what he had done would be to leave Beckett House for a life of poverty and dependence, since, from the woman who was her rival, and whose gold had outweighed her worth in his eyes, she would scorn to take a penny. Although a selfish man, Edgar

Dornay was (as yet) by no means callous, and the thought of these things gave him great discomfort. After much pondering, he had come to the conclusion that the best thing he could do for himself after his interview with Mrs. Beckett was to leave town for a few days; when on his return to Park Lane he felt well assured he should find the coast clear. Having made his plans thus far, he drew a long breath, like a man who "sees his way" through at least the first part of a difficulty; and, raising his eyes from the ground for the first time, saw Mary Marvon standing on the bridge.

At the same moment their eyes met; if they had not done so, Mr. Edgar Dornay would, without doubt, have turned his face homewards and gone back again; but though he felt himself to be a coward every inch of him, he was not such a coward as that. He mounted the slope that led to the bridge, and met her with an outstretched hand.

"I had no idea that you were to be found abroad so early, Mr. Dornay," said Mary. "Report has maligned you."

"Report generally does," he answered, gravely. "It is unfortunate for poor human nature, whose motives need extenuation rather than to have things set down in malice."

He was thinking of what she would say of him when she came to know all.

"You are philosophic," she said, smiling. "That is a bad sign; I am afraid you have not yet breakfasted, Mr. Dornay."

It was very true; he had sat down to the morning meal at Brighton, but, notwithstanding the boasted effects of the sea-breeze, had left it almost untasted. "You are taking your walk earlier than usual yourself, are you not, Mary?"

He would have said "Miss Marvon" had he dared, but his familiarity of manner had gone beyond that; she still gave him his proper title; but when they were alone together he had of late addressed her by her Christian name.

"Yes," she answered. "Mrs. Beckett is engaged with Mr. Rennie; he has come to transact some pressing and

important matter, she told me, which would deprive me of her companionship."

"What did she mean?" inquired Edgar, turning pale. To his disordered mind there seemed a dreadful significance in these simple words.

"Well, she meant that I must be content with my four-footed friend here this morning. Down, Alec! down, my dear!" for the affectionate creature, catching this allusion to himself, or at least the glance that accompanied it, wished to place, by way of epaulets, a gigantic paw on each of her dainty shoulders. "I did not, of course, calculate upon the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Dornay."

"No," he answered, gently, "no." His heart was melting within him like wax; the sight of her beauty, the sound of her voice, were overcoming him. Absence is said to "make the heart grow fonder," but presence, especially if the object of our affections is attractive, has a still more powerful influence in that way. This was the very thing that he had been afraid of—to meet her face to face—and he had reason to fear it.

"And how was Mr. Rennie looking?" He did not dare to speak of Mrs. Beckett. "As like the Sphinx as usual, I suppose—full of his secrets?"

"He is never secretive with me; not, of course, that he ever tells me anything, but he is most frank and kind. I venture to think that I am rather a favorite of his."

"I do not wonder at that."

She gave him, with infinite grace, an almost imperceptible courtesy. "Thank you, sir; but I am afraid it is from no personal merit that Mr. Rennie is so civil to me. I fancy it is a pleasant change to him to talk with one who never speaks of money, because she has none. Mrs. Beckett tells me that he has no such thing as a poor client. They are now probably disposing of tens of thousands—millions, for all I know—those two."

Edgar sighed.

"You are wishing that you had millions yourself, Mr. Dornay?"

"No; quite the contrary. I mean," he added, hastily, "that my heart was not just then fixed on—the subject you suggest."

"Then it sometimes is, I infer."

"Sometimes; that is, I have sometimes thought—as most of us have—how pleasant it would be to be rich."

They had left the bridge by this time, and were slowly crossing the Park in the direction of the Reformers' Tree. There was no one near them except Alexander, who followed closely behind. His brow was clouded, his head depressed; his massive jaws seemed to find attraction in the calves of Mr. Edgar Dornay's legs, as they alternately presented themselves to his notice.

"I have never speculated upon that subject myself," said Mary, gravely; "perhaps from the impossibility, in my case, of such a dream being realized. But I can easily understand your doing so. I do not think you are fitted to be a poor man."

"You mean a poor bachelor. In my present position I own that wealth has its allurements. Pleasure can be purchased, but happiness cannot; and, after all, what man desires is happiness, the lasting good."

"But one must be sure of its lasting," she answered, gravely; "that is the difficulty."

"No doubt. The best road to it, however, it is agreed upon all hands, is to secure a loving wife."

"That is not your uncle's view," said Mary, lightly. She knew whither his talk was tending, and did not wish to encourage it. Was it some presentiment that warned her to keep him at arm's-length that morning?

"There are doubtless some who are happiest as single men," admitted Edgar; "my Uncle Ralph, perhaps, for one; but do not suppose he does not advocate matrimony for others; for myself, for instance. Your ears should have burned the other night, since he spent hours of it in singing your praises."

"A somewhat new departure for him, was it not?" she inquired, dryly, but without surprise; for Mr. Ralph Dornay, as we know, had himself prepared her for it.

"Yes. It is never too late to mend, however, and I will do him the justice to say that his recantation has been a very full one."

Here some one met them on the path; and, in drawing nearer to the girl, his arm touched hers. When he had

shaken hands with her, twenty minutes ago, his mind had been divided between her and another; the clasp of her hand had thrilled him a little, but that had been all. But now, since he had been some time in her company, and his mind had been dwelling on her and no other, that touch set his pulses "throbbing with the fulness of the spring." In an instant, as a sudden wind from the gates of the sun clears the heavens of cloud, all sordid thoughts were swept away; the widow and her money were forgotten.

"As for Uncle Ralph, Mary," he continued, in a low and fervid tone, "he was never an obstacle to my love for you; nothing could be that; but he is my nearest relative, and of course it pleases me to feel that such opposition as was in his power to give has been withdrawn. Instead of being your enemy, he is now your ally."

"So he was so good as to tell me on Saturday," said Mary, coldly.

The young man saw that he had lost ground.

"Of course, Mary," he put in quickly, "it matters even less to you than it does to me whether Uncle Ralph approves of our being engaged or not. I only mentioned it to show that there were now no hinderances to it, however slight. You will not say 'No,' darling, merely because there is no reason for it, out of sheer caprice?"

"Certainly not," she said. "My doubts—for I have doubts—arise from no fanciful cause, but from what I know of your own nature."

"My nature! Would to Heaven, Mary, you could this moment look into my inmost heart; you would see yourself, and no other, mirrored there."

"I was not thinking of any other, Edgar," she said, with a slight blush; "to do you justice, I do not believe you capable of double-dealing."

His eyes left hers and sought the ground; the blush on her face was reflected on his own, and she attributed it to the same cause; she took it for modesty because she had praised him, and not for shame. "Moreover," she continued, "I quite believe that at this moment you think you could be happy with me without those luxuries—or with a great diminution of them—on which your happiness has hitherto so largely depended."

"My darling," he answered, vehemently, "what is luxury, what is wealth, compared with the possession of such a treasure as you? That is what I pine for; all else is as nothing to me. Oh, Mary, if you would only believe me!"

"I wish to believe you, Edgar," she answered, hesitatingly, "but I dare not."

His very fervor increased her reluctance, even while it filled her with delight; it seemed to her that it was wrong to take advantage of such headlong and unreasoning passion.

"Then, if you wish it, that is all *I* wish," he put in hastily. "My darling! my darling!"

He longed to clasp her in his arms; but that was impossible, as the trees in Hyde Park offer by no means that "boundless contiguity of shade" so essential for such a proceeding; moreover (though he would have risked *that*), Alexander would have probably resented any such demonstration. As for Mary, her limbs trembled beneath her, and thereby typified her mental condition. Shaken by the vehemence of his protestations and the fascination of his presence, her resolution was fast giving way.

"I must go in now, Edgar," she murmured.

"But not as you came out, Mary," he answered, quickly; "you are no longer a free woman, remember; you are mine."

"Not yet," she said, but this time with a faint smile.

It was her last protest.

"That is only because the agreement is not ratified," he murmured, tenderly. "I will come"—then he suddenly remembered that he could not come; that he no more dared enter into Beckett House on the errand in question than into the abode of the queen lioness in the Zoological Gardens—"that is, I will write to-day," he stammered; "then you will send me your answer in black and white; and it will be 'Yes,' my darling. I *know* it will be 'Yes.'"

"I suppose it must be 'Yes,'" said Mary, softly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUBSTITUTE.

HAVING once, though it is true only tacitly, consented to engage herself to Edgar Dornay, Mary Marvon ventured to be very happy. It is not, as we have been told, for companions and dependents to indulge themselves in the luxury of woe; how much more, then, in that of happiness! and though Mary herself, thanks to the fortunate circumstances of her position as much as to her native pride, felt little of this social depression, she seldom gave way to vivacity. On this occasion, however, the girl returned home in high spirits; and it was for this reason, perhaps, that she did not notice the unusual gayety of her hostess. Mrs. Beckett was generally what, if she were a man, would have been called "good company," but she had never before been so bright and merry. She was happy in the consciousness that she had, with Mr. Rennie's aid, conferred great advantage upon the man she loved, and happy also on her own account. But she did not, as on the last occasion when she and Mary were alone together, make marriage the topic of conversation. It would be necessary, sooner or later, of course, to allude to her engagement, but at present she shrank from it. Notwithstanding her protestations of independence and carelessness of the opinion of the world, she felt some embarrassment in communicating her news even to Mary Marvon.

Mary herself felt something of the same kind. She, indeed, had nothing to be ashamed of in those future prospects of which, not sooner or later, but very soon, it behooved her to speak to her hostess; for had not Mrs. Beckett, with her own lips, advised her to accept the first eligible offer? But she had an idea that her news would very much astonish the widow, and felt some coyness in broaching the subject *à propos des bottes*.

The only approach that Mrs. Beckett made to it, so far from encouraging her to pursue it, had quite a contrary effect. Her hostess informed the butler at luncheon that she would not require her carriage that afternoon, and also that she would be at home to nobody except Mr. Dornay.

"Mr. Ralph or Mr. Edgar, my lady?" he inquired. It was a most unfortunate question, for the widow's remark was intended to be of great significance. It was, in fact, her method of preparing the way for informing Mary of what had happened.

"I said Mr. Dornay," she answered, with severity. "If I had meant Mr. Ralph I should have said Mr. Ralph."

It was rather hard on the butler, who, less acquainted with precedence than with perquisites, naturally imagined that Mr. Ralph, being the elder, was of right Mr. Dornay. The sharpness of the widow's tone did not escape Mary's attention, but the remark itself filled her with amazement. How was it, if Edgar had an appointment with the widow, that he had not informed her (Mary) of it while they were in the Park together? and why had he spoken of writing to her when he was thus about to have so early an opportunity of seeing her? On the other hand—not, of course, anticipating their recent interview and its happy result—perhaps he had sought a personal interview with Mrs. Beckett, to enlist her assistance in pressing his suit.

Never were two women placed in a more false position to one another than were Mary Marvon and her hostess, and yet through no fault of their own.

After luncheon Mrs. Beckett retired to her boudoir, and Mary to her own room; each glad enough to be alone, but without the least mistrust or ill-feeling as respected the other.

By three o'clock the widow's impatience had become considerable. She was very far from wishing that any particular respect should be paid to her on the ground of age, but she could not but remember that when her last husband was courting her he was always rather before his time than after, and that even against Sir Robert there had been nothing to complain of as regarded punctuality. At a quarter past three o'clock she felt that she had been

foolish in making her Edgar so completely independent of her, and experienced some satisfaction in reflecting that the document which Mr. Rennie had sent to her according to promise was only a copy of her instructions. She appreciated, not for the first time, the wisdom of the legal doctrine that judgment should precede execution.

At half-past three her indignation against her Edgar was so considerable that she not only repented of all her good intentions towards the young man, but repented—not for the money's sake, but that of her own self-respect—of having sent him that little check for £500. Then her maid knocked at her door, and her heart leaped up with a joyful bound, and she felt she could forgive him anything.

“If you please, my lady, Mr. Dornay is here.”

“Why is he not shown up at once? Did I not give orders to Harris to that effect?”

“Why, yes, my lady; but he says as this is the wrong Mr. Dornay.”

“The wrong Mr. Dornay? What do you mean? Who is it?”

“Well, please, my lady, it's Mr. Ralph.”

This did not please my lady at all; indeed, it was very far from pleasing her; but she could not say so. At first, indeed, she was even more alarmed than disgusted. She feared that some accident had happened to Edgar. Good heavens, suppose he had been thrown from his horse! And she had just been accusing him of ingratitude, and of such infidelity as man, and man alone, was capable.

“Show Mr. Ralph Dornay up.”

He came, the very pink of perfection as to apparel; with his head erect, and a quick, elastic step; a very presentable gentleman of four-and-forty at oldest, but with a certain air of tender gravity which she had never before known him to wear.

He took the hand she extended towards him and pressed it respectfully. “Nothing has happened to your nephew, I trust?” she inquired, with irrepressible anxiety.

“Nothing—that is to say, physically; he is well enough in health.” She knew at once that he had changed his mind about her, as certainly as though she had heard it

from his own lips. A mist seemed to form itself before her eyes, but not from tears; the weakness to which she was giving way was not of that sort at all; she was livid with fury; the *spretæ injuria formæ*—second only to a wrong done to her offspring in its power of arousing woman's hate—was raging within her. But there was no heat. Her face was pale and rigid as marble, and it was in a very quiet tone that she observed,

“You know, I suppose, that I was expecting him.”

Uncle Ralph closed his eyes and uplifted his hands; no words could have more clearly expressed his shame and abhorrence of what had occurred; he looked like some virtuous father in a melodrama, desolated by the misconduct of an unworthy son.

“My dear Mrs. Beckett,” he answered, impressively, “I know *all*; that is to say,” he added, hastily, remembering that there were some incidents in the matter in hand (such as Mrs. Beckett's letter to his nephew) which he had better *not* know, “all that a man who feels he has behaved recklessly and discreditably dares to tell another. I am come here, not to excuse Edgar, nor even to palliate his conduct, but, so far as it admits of explanation, to explain it.”

The widow sat like a statue, “staring right on” at the wall behind him with straining eyes; she could not trust herself, such was the humiliation and shame—but, above all, the anger—that consumed her, to make so much as a sign. If life should stir within her ever so little it seemed to her that the pent-up torrent of her wrath must needs burst forth, and that she must “say things” of which she would repent her whole life long. This impassiveness was extremely embarrassing to Uncle Ralph, who was much in want of a lead; he felt like a man who starts upon an aerial voyage without a straw to tell him which way the wind is blowing, and is very much afraid of his balloon going to sea.

“The fact is, my dear Mrs. Beckett, my nephew Edgar is impressionable—too impressionable—tender-hearted, very susceptible of kindness, but a creature of impulse. Of course he did not acquaint me with the actual details of the transaction in question; but I understand that you exhibited the generosity that is habitual with you, though

it is such as does not enter into the dreams of others. There lay his error ; he attached too special and particular significance to an act which was with you one of every-day practice : in point of fact," concluded Uncle Ralph, beginning to lose confidence in his balancing-pole upon this very high rope, "you sent him some money."

"I did !" The words shot out from the poor lady's tight-shut lips like a pellet from a popgun. "The sum," she added, with more self-command of tone, "was a very small one."

"No doubt; that is, it seemed so to you, dear Mrs. Beckett ; but we have not all your princely revenues. Moreover, it is the characteristic of a nature such as Edgar's to exaggerate a kindness. His heart was overflowing with gratitude. On the impulse of the moment he wrote to you a letter which he now regrets, since in it (as I am given to understand) he offered you, though, it is true, only by implication, what was not his to give."

The widow smiled faintly; she felt sick at heart. This news that Edgar loved another was worse—ininitely worse—than all ; but still she smiled.

"You did not take it in that sense?" continued the other, eagerly. "I am, indeed, delighted to hear it; that was the very view of the matter I took myself. 'My dear Edgar,' I said, 'if Mrs. Beckett has taken your communication in earnest'"—the widow's brow darkened : Uncle Ralph altered his course with the speed of a skater who nears a hole—and a very deep one—"or, rather, I should say, if Mrs. Beckett fails to see that your gratitude has overwhelmed your judgment, your letter will give her annoyance. She will very justly consider it a piece of impertinence. That you are a great favorite of hers is true (which emboldens me to hope that she will forgive you), but she has never given you the slightest encouragement—even if you were free to do it, which you are not—to make any such proposal to her. It is one which a man much more suitable for her than yourself would, under her exceptional circumstances, hesitate to make, however he might admire and adore her."

Here Uncle Ralph's voice faltered ; it was clear that he was suffering from personal emotion.

“Such a proceeding on his part would be open to so much misconstruction, that he would prefer to carry his secret with him to the grave. But you—you have rushed in where—that is to say, where a more eligible, though not perhaps a more worthy, suitor would have hesitated to tread. My only hope—which, however, is a firm one—is, that this dear and excellent lady will have appreciated your motives, and therefore understood your mistake.” I told him all that,” concluded Uncle Ralph, wiping his forehead instead of his eyes. He was quite conscious of the anticlimax involved in the last sentence, but he really could not maintain this noble style any longer; it was like keeping five balls going in the air at once—all spiked.

“I quite understood the matter,” returned the widow, beginning to recover her self-possession, and feeling not a little grateful to her companion for pointing out to her any road which avoided the valley of humiliation; “but I thought your nephew would have had the grace to make an apology with his own lips.”

“Ah, madam, pray have pity upon him!” returned Uncle Ralph, pathetically. “He was ashamed to do so; perhaps he feared, in the presence of so much graciousness and beauty” (Mrs. Beckett blushed, not unbecomingly, and certainly not because she was offended), “that he should again waver in his allegiance where it was due by right—for indeed it had been offered, and was accepted.” A hope that his previous words had fanned anew in the widow’s breast here faded away and became cold embers. Uncle Ralph read it in her face, but he could not afford to spare her. It was necessary to his own interests that that hope should die, and he accordingly set his heel upon it. “Yes, madam, my nephew is engaged to another lady. So far, as I told him, he is the more excusable, since, being so situated, his conduct towards yourself shows that he had taken leave of his senses.”

Without taking notice of this plea of insanity, Mrs. Beckett inquired, in quiet tones, “Has your nephew been long engaged to be married?”

The word “long” in respect of time is almost as vague and variable as the carpenter’s definition of magnitude—“about the size of a piece of chalk.” Uncle Ralph knew

very well—for Edgar had made a clean breast to him of everything at luncheon, and besought his assistance—that his engagement to Mary was about three hours old, but it would have been injudicious to say so. “Not a very long time,” he replied, evasively; “but the attachment is an old one, and to me, I must say,” he added, with a gentle sigh, “a most inexplicable one.”

“Why?”

The curtness of this monosyllabic inquiry seemed to disconcert Mr. Ralph Dornay exceedingly.

“Well, there are certain reasons, madam, if you compel me to mention them. Under the same roof with the object of my nephew’s affections, who has little beyond personal beauty and (I admit) a sweet disposition to recommend her, there dwells another lady equally attractive in those respects, and in my humble opinion a thousand times more worthy of a man’s devotion.”

“Do I know this young woman, Mr. Dornay?”

“You do, madam.”

She had anticipated no other reply, but its effect was extraordinary. Her eyes literally flashed fire; she did not speak, but her lips moved rapidly; her foot tapped vehemently upon the floor as if in warning to something within her—her temper—to keep itself within bounds.

“I have heard of a fit of jealousy,” thought Uncle Ralph to himself, “and begad she is going to have one. This is the worst bit of the road, and I wish I was well over it.”

“So—so, Mr. Dornay,” continued the widow, in a voice between a hiss and a scream, “your nephew has been paying court to Miss Marvon—my companion—has he, beneath my very roof? I hope, at least, that his intentions were honorable.”

“Come, that’s well,” thought Uncle Ralph; “that *must* have relieved her.” But it was with a deprecating air and in very gentle tones that he replied, “Oh, yes; as far as that goes, certainly. Indeed, I have a letter from him to the young lady herself which, as I have reason to believe, sets forth—”

“Give it me!” and Mrs. Beckett held forth her hand with an imperious gesture.

Here was a crisis indeed. If he committed what he knew to be Edgar's private offer of marriage to Mary Marvon into the widow's hands, good-bye forever to his nephew's friendship; a long farewell to all the advantages flowing from "the head of the family" and ancestral ties; but if he refused, it was equally plain that he would lose the widow.

"There is nothing, my dear Mrs. Beckett, *nothing*—that I could find in my heart to refuse you; I would that you could read that heart."

"I have—I do," she said, significantly. He took her still extended hand and kissed it. "Is it possible," he whispered, softly but boldly, "that I may hope one day to call this mine?"

She did not say "Yes"—though she had certainly well understood him—and she did not say "No." Many emotions were at work within her—though none of them was love—which urged her to accept him. The most powerful of them was pique, which has driven both man and woman into wedlock with more precipitancy than ever love did; there was revenge, which she could wreak by this means both upon the unfaithful Edgar and on Mary; and there was pride, for thus she saw her way to save herself from humiliation in the eyes of Mr. Rennie. But amid it all her thoughts were much more occupied with her old love than with her new.

"Give me the letter!" she repeated—"your nephew's letter."

Uncle Ralph put a note into her hand; it was addressed to herself in Edgar's handwriting.

"What is this?" she inquired.

"Carried away by emotion, and overwhelmed by gratitude to you for holding out a hope to me which I myself had scarcely ventured to entertain, I had forgotten this little matter," he said. "I believe it contains nothing but your check."

She tore it across and across with vehemence, and snowed the fragments on the floor.

"I want his letter to Mary Marvon."

It was certainly a breach of confidence, and something worse, but Mr. Ralph Dornay had gone too far to retreat;

he gave her Mary Marvon's letter. She clutched it with eager haste.

"I know you will respect the contents," he said; not that he thought she would, but by way of protest against their violation, and because he had been brought up as a gentleman.

"Truly, they merit respect," was the scornful rejoinder. "You may depend, Mr. Dornay, upon this letter reaching its destination; and now, if you please, I must be alone."

"And when, my dear Mrs. Beckett"—he did not even yet dare address her by her Christian name—"may I hope to see you again? After having made me the happiest of men, do not doom me to banishment, every moment of which will be torture."

"To-morrow."

"At what hour shall I find you alone?"

"At any hour," she answered (with an exultant look which the other neatly translated "Miss Sharp-tongue will get her *cong e*, then, at once"); "you may come to lunch if you like."

"At two o'clock, then, to-morrow: good-bye." He took her hand, and, once more raising it to his lips, whispered so that she could hear it or not, as she pleased, "Dear, dearest Kitty."

CHAPTER XII.

TWO WOMEN.

THERE are bad men as there are bad women—and a great many more of the former than of the latter—but good does not become bad in the male with such rapidity as in the female. *Nemo repente*, etc., is a remark that does not apply to the softer sex. They are quicker about everything; and, for one thing, to take offence. Wound a woman, even by accident, in her susceptibilities, her admiration for her husband, her love for her children, her own good looks, or her age, and you will "see sparks." Should

she be supplanted in the affections of her lover, it will arouse a sleeping devil such as you never would believe could have found harbor in so fair a form. Whether you resist him or not, he will not "flee from you," and you may be considered exceptionally fortunate if he does not fly *at* you.

If Mrs. Beckett has not given the reader the impression of being, on the whole, a good sort of woman, it is the fault of him who has described her; but just at present she is hardly recognizable as a woman at all. Edgar Dornay's letter to Mary Marvon lies before her unopened; I don't say she would have read it if she could, but I think it fortunate that he did not put it into an adhesive envelope, but took the precaution to seal it. In a metaphorical sense, she had already read it, for her eyes pierced through and through it; she would have given a thousand pounds to have been able to possess herself of its contents without detection; but the Dornay crest was a peculiar one, and though she might be said to have duplicated her arrangements with certain members of the family, she had no duplicate of *that*.

Another letter lay beside it, in the same handwriting—the one she had herself received but yesterday from her faithless swain; he had lied to her, humiliated her, played her false, and she had not one spark of affection left for him. But she did not at that moment hate him as she hated that "impudent, treacherous, designing minx"—who, as a matter of fact, had not injured her in thought or word or deed—Mary Marvon.

The second letter—the widow's own—was loathsome to her, but she was glad that she had not torn it up in her first paroxysm of fury (which she had been tempted to do), as she had torn the check, for it still had its uses. Presently, though it was like putting a serpent there, she placed it in her bosom, and with the other (Mary's letter) in her hand she descended into the drawing-room and rang the bell.

"Is Miss Marvon within doors?"

"I believe so, my lady."

"Tell her—that is, tell Simmons to tell her—that I wish to see her in her own room."

After a few minutes, to admit of her being prepared for her and alone, the widow went up-stairs as Eleanor visited Rosamond—the bowl in one hand, the dagger in the other, but her errand was less merciful—it was her intention to use both.

Mary, inclined for solitude, and chewing the cud of sweet reflection, had been more annoyed than surprised by the maid's message; it had interrupted some bright day-dreams; but it was not unusual for Mrs. Beckett to seek half an hour's intimate talk with her young companion, which she playfully termed "a kegmeg." Poor Mary, who had been waiting for the postman with her ears pricked, little imagined what sort of a kegmeg it was destined to be.

Directly she caught sight of Mrs. Beckett's face, indeed, she knew that something was wrong, and very wrong; not a suspicion, however, crossed her mind of the real state of the case. She rose quickly, with a look of affectionate sympathy. "My dear Mrs. Beckett, what has happened?"

"I have brought you a letter, Miss Marvon:" here she threw it on the table. "It is for you, is it not?" for Mary was gazing at it with wild surprise. "You know the handwriting, I suppose, and I fancy you must have been expecting it."

"Yes, Mrs. Beckett, I did expect it."

Mary had drawn herself up to her full height, and was looking the widow straight in the face; her manner was respectful, but by no means subservient. Her voice was resolute, and without a tremor. It seemed to say, "You are my social superior, but you have no right to interfere with my private affairs."

"Oh, you did, did you? You have the impudence to tell me that?"

"Madam!"

"Yes; I repeat it, *the impudence*. How dare you look me in the face like that, conscious as you must be of such underhand and shameful ways? Yes, you may well blush; I am glad to see you *can* blush."

"You must have gone mad, Mrs. Beckett," interrupted Mary; not because she thought so, but because, though a

sweet-tempered and generous girl, she was not a patient Griselda.

"That is true," was the widow's unexpected reply. "I must have gone stark staring mad to have so long believed in the innocence of such a treacherous, artful creature; to have wasted kindness and consideration on such an ingrate. I ought to have remembered the proverb about setting beggars on horseback."

"And when, madam, may I ask, have I ever begged of you?"

It was a pertinent question; for twenty times had the widow protested to her young companion that she was a treasure that no money could buy, and that the obligation in the matter of her engagement at Beckett House lay on the side of the employer, and not of the employed. Mary's salary, though a liberal one, was not excessive, and she herself had declined, notwithstanding Mrs. Beckett's repeated solicitations, to have it raised. It could certainly not be said with any truth that she had begged of her. There was a faint mitigation in Mrs. Beckett's tone. It was still vinegar, but vinegar without cayenne pepper, as she replied, "At all events, Miss Marvon, your condition here was that of an inferior, and it ill became you, indeed, to set your cap, as you have done, at a gentleman like Mr. Dornay, my guest and equal."

"Measured by the purse, madam," returned Mary, coldly, "no doubt you are in a very superior position; still, there are other standards. I will admit—though I see it now for the first time—that my proper course was to have told you of Mr. Dornay's attentions to me; but I will not admit, no, not for a moment, that there was anything to be reprobated in my encouraging them, even if I did encourage them, which, as he will tell you, I never did."

"*He* will tell me!" echoed the other, disdainfully. "Do you think I shall stoop to ask him? Do you think I don't know how your whole scheme was carried on as though I had seen it played? Your pretence of modesty, your mock humility, your *innocence*, while all the time your heart—no, not your heart, your cunning, artful mind—was fixed on making him your husband; him, in whose veins

runs the best blood in England, and you, a baseborn nobody—nobody's child!"

"That is false!" interrupted the girl, with a deep flush. "Everything you say is false! Who told you I was—what you said just now?"

"Never mind who told me. I know it. Ask your friend Mrs. Sotheran. *You* to marry Edgar Dornay; *you!* I wish him joy of you. Read his letter, his offer of disinterested love; and when you have read it, read *that!*" She took the note that lay in her bosom, and threw it on the table beside the other. "You will see there that you were not the first to whom he has offered himself; that you were but a second thought, such as strikes a man on the spur of the moment—a *pis aller*—a makeshift, that he takes up with out of pique, when he has failed to secure for himself wealth and station."

She was gone in a moment, leaving the letters behind her, and Mary gazing at them with bewildered looks.

What had happened? What did it all mean? All that she knew for certain was that a terrible change had befallen her, and that she was not the same woman who but a few minutes ago had been indulging in dreams of happiness, lapping herself in soft Lydian airs, or rather, to that "unheard music" which the poet truly tells us is sweeter far than any evoked from chord.

Mrs. Beckett had said many things which, whether true or false, demanded her immediate attention; it behooved her to look them in the face, and, for the future, life itself in the face. She knew even now that she would have to fight her way in the world alone, and well indeed for her if that should prove the worst of it. Poor she knew she was—but base-born! If *that* was true—well, what mattered? What need is there to blush for offences for which we ourselves are in no way to blame? Yet the color was high in poor Mary's cheeks.

First to be considered, however—if, indeed, she was capable of consideration or reflection—were the letters. Mrs. Beckett had recommended her to read them in a certain order. It was but natural that she should take the contrary course. She read the widow's letter first:

“MY DEAR MRS. BECKETT,—Your kind letter has affected me beyond measure. I feel I am not worthy of your love, but I hope to become worthy of it. I shall be with you at three o'clock on Monday, when I shall trust to find you alone. Ever yours affectionately,
“EDGAR DORNAY.”

The date was Saturday—only Saturday! He was to have been with Mrs. Beckett to-day, almost at that very hour. Doubtless he would have been with her had she not rejected him by letter in the meantime; and having received that letter, and found his chances of “securing wealth and station” (those were the woman’s very words) were over, he had offered his disdained hand that very morning to herself. Poor Mary! If her rival’s advice had been followed, her cup would, without doubt, have been made more bitter for her; to have opened her lover’s letter first, and afterwards to have learned his infidelity, would have been hard indeed. But she was forewarned and forearmed. His burning words of passion reached her heart, but could not sear it; it had, to some extent, been rendered callous; his protestations of eternal love awoke no answering chord, and even some contempt. She had misplaced her love; but, having discovered her mistake, she was not one of those who waste it to the very dregs upon an unworthy object. She was not angry with him, as Mrs. Beckett had been; nay, even while she despised him, she pitied him. “What was luxury, what was wealth,” he had said to her only a few hours ago, “compared with such a treasure as herself?” And only a few hours before he had told her so, he had proposed to the richest widow in England! She did not know, of course, what had actually occurred—that the widow had sent him money and proposed to *him*; yet she pretty accurately guessed how matters lay, and the motives that had actuated him. She felt that Edgar Dornay had preferred her to her rival all along; that his love for her had even to a certain extent been genuine; nay, she believed (reading his conduct of the morning by the light now thrown upon it) that he had experienced a certain sense of relief in having been rejected by the widow, and left free to

follow what had been his inclination throughout. But Mary Marvon was not the sort of woman who is willing to accept a man's inclination in exchange for her love. Not for one single instant did she entertain the thought of his now becoming her husband. It was not the apprehension of any weakness on her own part—the idea that with reflection should intrude the least shadow of a doubt—which caused her to sit down and pen him these few lines at once :

“DEAR SIR,—Mrs. Beckett has just handed me your letter, as well as your note of Saturday addressed to herself. I have no more to say to you save that I wish you well.

Yours sincerely,

“MARY MARVON.”

She merely wished to get that matter over and done with ; as to getting it “off her mind,” that, alas ! was quite another thing. It was likely to remain as long as memory held its seat there. It seemed to her as though her love had not so much been misplaced as mislaid ; that the faculty of entertaining the passion was irrevocably lost. If she had not had that faculty she would have missed nothing ; it is not the man who is born blind who suffers, but the man who has had the use of his sight and becomes blind.

There are certain cases of misfortune in which our very deficiencies are of advantage to us ; not in matters material—every drawback is there an additional source of unhappiness—but in those of sentiment and spiritual life. When, for instance, one is poor, and there is an absolute necessity for exertion, the bruised heart does not feel its pain as it does when one is prosperous ; one must needs be up and doing, either for one's own sake or for that of others, and work not only prevents us from brooding over our calamities, but itself is balm. To stay another hour under Mrs. Beckett's roof seemed intolerable to Mary ; there was an immediate necessity for her leaving it ; but whither, in her forlorn and friendless condition, should she go ?

To Letcombe Dottrell she could hardly go without an

invitation, or, at least, an express permission from Mrs. Sotheran. There had been always a disinclination on the part of that lady to see her at her own home; she had been so kind and friendly to her in all other respects that this had hitherto seemed inexplicable to Mary. But now, after those cruel words of Mrs. Beckett, she felt that there might be some reason for it. Base-born! If so, the past, like the future, was full of humiliation and bitterness; it had been a mistaken kindness to conceal such a misfortune from her; but now, at all events, it behooved her to know the worst. Only there were things still more pressing. First and foremost her letter to Edgar must be despatched; while it remained unsent, it seemed to her that she was bound by invisible but shameful chains; and then she must cast about in her mind for some temporary home in town till Mrs. Sotheran could be communicated with. She was about to ring the bell when Simmons entered.

My lady's lady's-maid, as she delighted to call herself, was of mature years and of a rueful countenance; her inferiors addressed her as Mrs. Simmons, but it was but a title of courtesy; she still withered upon the virgin thorn. She was a mere anatomy of a woman, reminding you, in her extreme scragginess, of the poet's ungallant observation, "Madam, if I know your sex by the fashion of your bones." But her frame was always elegantly appressed, and within it there was a kindly heart. She had never felt the antipathy of her class towards her mistress's "companion;" and, now she was in trouble, she sympathized with her. What had actually happened of course she did not know; she would have given her ears to know, though they were an exceptionally large pair; but she well understood that Miss Marvon had had notice to quit, or, as Mr. Harris below stairs had more concisely expressed it, "had got the sack!"

"If you please, Miss Marvon, my lady bade me give you this note."

It ran as follows:

"Mrs. Beckett thinks it possible that, after what has taken place, Miss Marvon may think it expedient to remove at once from Beckett House. This, in Mrs. Beckett's opinion, is not necessary, as the house is large enough to

afford Miss Marvon accommodation and privacy without annoyance to any one. The enclosed check, due to Miss Marvon for her services, is simply sent for her personal convenience, and by no means as a hint that her presence is no longer desirable. During the remainder of Miss Marvon's stay at Beckett House her meals will be served—since that arrangement will probably be more agreeable to her—in her own apartment."

"Please to thank Mrs. Beckett, Simmons," said Mary, softly, "and say I will take advantage of her consideration; and be so good as to have this letter sent by the first post."

Even as it was, she was touched by her hostess's note; and if she had known all—that is, how severely the widow's *amour propre* had been wounded—she would have regarded her late conduct with still greater charity. The fact was, as was remarked in the servants' hall, where opinion is in the main correct, "My lady was not a bad sort." Though, like most of her sex, she could be very "small" upon occasions (or even when there was no occasion), her nature was not a petty one, and, albeit easily moved to passion, she was quick to repent of it. Nay, even when still angry, and very angry—as in the present instance—she had a certain generosity of spirit towards the object of her dislike. She felt it would be a mean and cowardly action for one in her position to thrust forth from her doors, in doubt as to where she should lay her head, a poor and friendless girl, even though she had been her successful rival. She was her guest, too; and enough of simplicity of character remained to the widow to make her feel the duties of hospitality; perhaps she even confessed to herself that she was old enough to be Mary's mother, and that it was her duty to protect her. That remark about the house being large enough for two might even have been taken for conciliation, had the girl been inclined that way. Then, as to material matters, Mrs. Beckett had been generous; she had added a quarter's salary, in lieu of notice, to the money due to her late companion. This, however, through her perturbation of mind, had for the moment escaped Mary's attention.

Though the necessity for her departure seemed no longer so pressing, she was very anxious to depart, and unwilling

to wait till letters could be exchanged between herself and Mrs. Sotheran. The only friend except Charley, who under the circumstances was out of the question, upon whose advice she could rely in London, was Mr. Rennie. She had no claim upon him, indeed, whatever; but his manner to her had been always so cordial—with a touch of the guardian too, which encouraged her even more than its cordiality—that she resolved to ask his aid. It was a very small thing she required of him—namely, a recommendation to some respectable lodging—but it was essential she should have it. She did not, of course, enter into the reasons which caused her to desire so immediate a change of quarters; and she knew, even if Mr. Rennie should come to her, that he was far too reticent and judicious a man to compel her to give them. It would be enough for him to know that a breach had taken place between herself and her hostess that was irreparable. Curiously enough, while Mary was penning her simple despatch to the worthy lawyer, her hostess was also writing a few lines to the same gentleman upon a widely different subject, and dealing with much more important matters:

“DEAR MR. RENNIE,—I have been thinking over our conversation of this morning, and have come to the conclusion that your opinion is the correct one. You may consider my previous instructions—a copy of which you were so good as to send me—as cancelled. My engagement, of course, remains an accomplished fact; but I shall not settle the £50,000, nor indeed any sum, upon Mr. Dornay. Your suggestion that he should have a life interest out of the estate is, after all, the most reasonable, and will, I am sure, be quite satisfactory to him. I will communicate with you further upon the matter in a few days.

Yours most faithfully,

“KATE BECKETT.”

“What a fortunate thing it is,” reflected the widow, as she sealed her letter, “that, though I admitted his name began with a D and ended with Y, I never told Mr. Rennie which Mr. Dornay it was!”

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. SOTHERAN.

ALTHOUGH no immediate help or advice could be looked for from Letcombe Dottrell, the need for writing to Mrs. Sotheran seemed to Mary the most imperative of all the matters that pressed upon her attention. She had little doubt, since Mrs. Beckett had said so, that her parentage had not only been obscure but disgraceful. That it was more humble on the one side than on the other she had guessed for herself; partly from what Mrs. Sotheran had told her, and partly from her silence upon the subject. Either her father or her mother had, by their marriage, annoyed certain members of the family of one of them; and what was so likely to have been the cause as an inequality of social position? The effect of this had been, she had been led to understand, disinheritance; and, having this fact in her mind, it is certain that if Edgar Dornay had had either father or mother to say him nay, Mary would never have consented to become his wife. But these conclusions of hers had, it now seemed, been drawn from wrong premises, and Mrs. Sotheran had had a better (or worse) reason for her long reticence as respected her parents than she had ever suspected. It was necessary to resolve all doubt upon this matter, if doubt she could be said to have; though she had to face the world alone, she would do so under no false colors. Pretence and concealment were abhorrent to her. She almost thanked Mrs. Beckett for having opened her eyes, however roughly, to her true position. How terrible it would have been to have suffered Edgar's engagement to have gone on in ignorance of the stain of her birth! She was far, however, from being angry with Mrs. Sotheran, whose silence, she well understood, had been dictated by kindness and consideration.

By the same post by which her note was despatched to Mr. Rennie she wrote to Letcombe Dottrell :

“MY DEAR MRS. SOTHERAN,—A very serious disagreement has taken place between Mrs. Beckett and myself, which will at once necessitate my leaving her house ; so be so good as to reply to me to the care of Mr. Rennie, who will be in possession of my address. Of the cause of quarrel I cannot write now at any length ; let it suffice to say that Mrs. Beckett is angry with me for having encouraged the attentions of a visitor at her house, and has spoken to me upon the subject in such terms as renders any further communication with her impossible. It is not true that I encouraged his attentions ; they were paid to me without the least encouragement ; but it is quite true that, but for other circumstances to which it is now unnecessary to allude, I should have accepted them. All that is over now ; but what most annoyed Mrs. Beckett, as she gave me to understand, was the difference in social position between myself and the gentleman in question. As I knew of no difference, save the mere conventional ones of rank and money, I defended myself from her reproaches with some spirit. I am not aware of it, but it is possible that I even lost my temper. Then she told me—what I certainly did not know, and which, if I had known, would have caused me to take a very different view of the case—that I was base-born—‘nobody’s child,’ as she termed it. Dear Mrs. Sotheran, do not think I blame you for having so long concealed so painful a fact from my knowledge ; but is this true ? One word will be sufficient—‘Yes,’ or ‘No.’ It would have been better, far better, had I known it before ; but it is absolutely necessary that I should know it now. It will make no difference to me ; nothing can make any difference to me.”

Here the girl uttered a deep sigh, and laid her pen down upon the table. That last sentence had expressed the whole state of the case as regarded her own feelings. Happy the man, and happier the woman, who has never been forced to utter, from the depths of a bruised heart, “Nothing can henceforth make any difference to me.” It is never true, of course ; for everything makes a difference ;

but in that supreme hour of agony and despair in which we hear nothing but the mould upon Hope's coffin-lid, it seems to be true.

"I wish to know," she wrote, "my true position in every respect. I have no relations of any kind, so you need not be afraid of disagreeing with me. Dear Mrs. Soth-eran, this is not, I fear, the first time I should write to so old and tried a friend, and for the kindness I owe so much. Forgive me, and believe me ever yours. However low my lot may be in the world, let me at least stand on firm ground. Yours affectionately,
"MARY MARVON."

The tongue of man is but a small member, yet (like Cromwell, who represented Huntingdon) what great things doth it effect! And even still more may this be said of the pen. It is of small consequence who writes with it; it is the thing written which does the work and remains. Who would think that a few words jotted down in despondency by a penniless girl just turned out of her situation could affect any one but herself? Human society, however, is but as one great body full of nerves, sensitive in all its parts, and conscious even of a thorn in its foot—which is fortunate, for otherwise some of us would care little on what (or whom) we trod.

That missive of poor Mary's, a mere wail of impotent distress, dropped into the pillar-box by John Thomas with a sniff of contempt for the ex-companion—for every one knew she was "going"—sorted with ten thousand others as though they were the rags from which they came, but each bearing its message of weal or woe, was fated to cause some commotion.

Its destination was a village in Dorsetshire; its recipient a widow of fifty-five or so, living in a cottage of gentility (though it had no double coach-house) called "The Bank." Any dwelling less like a bank it was difficult to imagine: it was very slightly built, and being in a part of the country where thieves were never known to break through and steal, it had neither bolt nor bar belonging to it. The front-door was, indeed, religiously locked every night; but as the two windows on either side of it opened to the

ground, and had only outside *jalousies* by way of shutters, the precaution was somewhat superfluous. Above it towered a huge sand-bank (from which it took its name), pigeon-holed by sand-bags who kept the air about it in a perpetual twitter. ~~Although~~ ~~the~~ ~~front~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~house~~, which now in blossom, ran round the front of the house, which commanded a lovely view of the foreground a pretty lawn and garden, with a ~~number~~ ~~of~~ ~~groves~~; beyond, a vast expanse of landscape, with ~~the~~ ~~sea~~ on the horizon, which was the sea. Half-way down the hill on which the cottage was set was a confused mass of towers and turrets, betokening the presence of some stately mansion.

The mistress of the cottage, a faded and somewhat sickly looking lady, though with that expression of kindness and good-will which is the dower of a gentle and harmless nature, was watering some flowers in the veranda, when that quick, firm step (at once suggesting haste and burden) which belongs to postmen was heard upon the gravel-sweep without. She looked up from her occupation with a flush of apprehension; not that she expected bad news, but because, from her temperament, and it must be added from her experience—for it had been a sad one—bad news always suggested itself to her more naturally than good news. At the sight of the missive the man put in her hand, however, her countenance resumed its usual expression. It was only a letter from Mary Marvon. She was glad it was not from Charley, for she had heard from him the day before, and a second letter from him might have betokened something amiss. It did not strike her that there could be anything amiss with Mary.

The girl had fallen into her hands under what Mrs. Sotheran called "very trying" circumstances, and had at first imposed upon her a responsibility which she had felt to be greater than she could bear; but from the date of that event—which still stood up in her life, otherwise barren of sensational incident, like a pyramid on a plain—all things had gone on smoothly (and far more so than she had ventured to expect) as regarded her young charge.

For eighteen years Mrs. Sotheran had carried the burden of the secret of Mary Marvon's birth, shared with her by only one other person; and she was a woman as little

fitted for secrets as a cat for draught. Not that she was a gossip—far from it; but she was timid and diffident, unequal to the weight of her own affairs, much more to conduct or to be privy to those of other people. She did her duty, but always in fear and trembling, lest she should fall short of it. She had seen her husband and all her children, save Charley, fade and die; she had fought the battle of life with narrow means and little strength, but still without absolute defeat; and yet she shrank from its dangers as though she had been a young recruit, who had never heard a shot fired, or seen the moonbeams sleeping on the upturned faces of the dead. Her spirit was broken, her frame was weak; she “had had enough of it.” Her one prayer to the Divine Mercy, save for Charley, would have been, “Take me out of this.”

If there had not been other and stronger reasons for keeping Mary Marvon at a distance, she felt that she would have been no fit companion for a young girl, a flower that needs the sunshine; but she had done her best for her elsewhere, and, on the whole, with success.

There had been no murmurs from Mary; if there had been matters to complain of, she had concealed them, and above all she had not troubled her with questions about her past. The knowledge that her parents were dead, and that she had no relations who showed any solicitude about her, seemed sufficient for her. There would be some trouble about it, doubtless, when she married (Mrs. Sotheran always foresaw troubles long before the shadow of them fell upon her); but until then matters promised to go smoothly enough.

Mary's letters, therefore, were among the few things that did not agitate Mrs. Sotheran, or, to use her own homely phrase, “put her into a pucker”—a moderately cold perspiration. In fact, she rather liked to hear from Mary, who wrote pleasant little records of her doings, anecdotes of the gay world, and opened for her, as it were, a door through which, without being herself observed, she could catch a glimpse of Vanity Fair. And not a letter had come without the narration of some kindness on Mrs. Beckett's part to her *protégée*, for which Mary seemed to thank her original protectress at second-hand. As the

morning was cool and balmy, Mrs. Sotheran did not go indoors to read her letter, but seated herself on one of the wicker chairs (a present from Charley) which stood on the lawn, and afforded an excellent substitute for a garden-bench. She arranged herself, in short, for ten minutes' enjoyment.

Mary's first words, however—"A very serious disagreement has taken place between Mrs. Beckett and myself"—put to flight all hopes of repose. It was curious to see the physical effect produced upon the poor lady as she read on. At first her delicately pencilled eyebrows rose on her forehead, and her thin lips emitted a deprecating murmur—"Dear, dear, what a pity!" Then her features began to stiffen, as it were, into stone; a look of inexpressible pain and fear came into her eyes; and, presently, she dropped the letter on her lap with a groan of dismay. "Base-born!" Then the secret was out at last—or at least some of it; for that the whole should have to be told was even now a thing not to be thought of. One word said to this poor girl would be sufficient, it seemed—"Yes," or "No;" and for that moderation on Mary's part, ill as they had played her, Mrs. Sotheran thanked her stars. It would not, at least, be necessary to enter into explanations. On the other hand, Mary had concluded her communication with the words, "Be frank with me. However low my lot may be in the world, let me at least stand on firm ground."

Alas! there was nothing firm for her to stand on; all was quicksand.

As Mrs. Sotheran pondered over the letter, with her eyes fixed on the landscape before her, it faded from her view, and in its place there grew this picture: A small, low room, sparsely furnished, but scrupulously clean; a bed on which lay a young woman, worn with woe and haggard with unceasing pain, but still of exquisite beauty. It was the beauty, however, which death covets; the pallor of the tomb was on her brow; the hectic—Nature's flag of distress—burned on her cheek; and the voice was broken and feeble with which she pleaded, "You will take care of my child, dear friend, till her father comes to claim her?"

"I will," Mrs. Sotheran had answered, eagerly; some-

thing had almost prompted her to add, "I will take care of her, whether he comes or not;" for in her heart she did not believe that he would ever come. Twenty-four hours earlier the idea of such a responsibility would have appalled her, and she would have shrunk from it; but very little time suffices to alter human intentions, whether for good or ill. The receipt of a telegram; a hurried journey; the finding of an old acquaintance, poor, deserted, and at the point of death, had changed the Mrs. Sotheran of yesterday into another woman. She regarded her dying companion with pitiful, yearning eyes; and presently, as though her emotions of compassion could be pent up no longer, she burst into a great sob. "I did at least hope that he would have married you, my poor, dear girl."

The hectic flush broadened a little on either cheek; the large eyes, lit with the fever within, became bedewed with tears, and shone like the sun-dew. She raised a skeleton finger for silence. "Very good, my dear," continued Mrs. Sotheran; "I will not say a word against him; it will not be with me that he will have to deal, but with Another. But I do hope that he has made whatever provision lay in his power for the babe."

The speaker's eye had wandered to a little desk of solid workmanship and bound with steel, as though in that repository might be the legal document at which she hinted.

The dying woman's face had turned in the same direction.

"Do you want the desk, my dear?" The shake of the still shapely head, from which the clustering curls had been ruthlessly shorn, was almost imperceptible; but the other gathered from it that it was not the desk that was wanted.

"The child is asleep," said Mrs. Sotheran, pointing to a cradle that stood close beside her.

Again there was a shake of the head, and the eyes sought the same object as before.

The only object on the table except the desk was a little Bible; she accordingly brought that to the bedside.

"Kiss it, kiss it!" murmured the dying woman. "Swear

to me that you will never seek to learn the contents of that desk, without my—without his—permission.”

Then Mrs. Sotheran did what was very difficult for her—she took courage. It would have been much more easy for her to give the required promise; but the reflection that such a course might injuriously affect the child's interest occurred to her; it must be added, too, that a righteous indignation was burning in her heart against the man of whom they spoke.

“Do you say this, my poor girl, out of fear? There is none you need fear now but God, remember; and I humbly hope his wrath has ceased against you.”

“I do not say it out of fear,” answered the other, in clearer tones, her anxiety to set this matter right seeming to give her a momentary strength; “I say it out of love; not for his sake,” for Mrs. Sotheran's face had involuntarily darkened, “but for the child's.”

Then Mrs. Sotheran kissed the book and gave the promise required of her.

It is needless to say she had kept it. Even if, under such solemn circumstances, she had passed her word only, it would not have been broken; but an oath had for Mrs. Sotheran a signification which, to those accustomed to courts of justice, would have been unintelligible. She really did believe that whomsoever should break it God would no longer “help.” To her mind it had even something of the supernatural in it; it was the one supreme occasion on which, since the age of miracles was past, man and his Creator could still make a compact together. If Mary Marvon's inquiries had required for their answer that Mrs. Sotheran should open that desk, they would, without question, have remained unsatisfied. Her heart, albeit as tender a one as ever beat in woman's breast, would have been as the nether millstone as regarded any such appeal; and this, although the man was dead concerning whom the promise had been given that the desk should not be opened till he came to claim it, and had been dead for many a year.

It was here that the narrowness of this good woman's mind stood out like a ridge of rock in a fertile field. She clung to the letter, and not to the spirit; not, as is the

case with most of us, from baseness of disposition, but simply because the letter was dear to her, and the spirit was not. The whole incident, contrasting as it did in its dramatic force with the even tenor of her life, had made a very deep impression on her. To one person only she had breathed it, though, even in that case, without mention of her oath; and this enforced reticence had swelled its proportions. But, as time rolled on, and nothing had come of it, apprehension had ceased; the matter had lain so long undisturbed in its pigeon-hole, under the dust of years, that it was quite unnoticed—till Mary's letter came, which taught poor Mrs. Sotheran with iron rod that "there is no such thing as forgetting."

The perturbation of her mind was such that it was long before she could decide on any course of action; but, in the end, she rose, and, putting on her bonnet, went out.

Her way led down a winding road between high, wooded banks, which after a mile or more reached the plain as a river debouches on the sea; but half-way down she stopped before some high gates, finely wrought in iron and richly gilded. Without waiting for the lodge-keeper to admit her, she opened a side-door and walked rapidly on; her mind was too fully occupied to take note of external objects; otherwise, albeit the scene was familiar to her, it could hardly have failed to extort her admiration. She was passing through an avenue of oaks, on one side of which lay a well-wooded park, with herds of deer; on the other, a landscape of exquisite beauty that sloped "with lessening fields and farms" to the dim, far-off ocean.

Immediately in front, but at the end of a long descent (as became so stately a pile), stood Letcombe Hall, "the seat" (as it was called in the county history) of the Paton family, now, alas! bidding fair to be extinct. The grounds about it, of which a complete bird's-eye view was now obtained, were laid out in antique fashion, with walled gardens, a huge rosery, and—instead of a croquet or lawn-tennis ground—a bowling-green as smooth as a billiard-table. All these had their various tenants, male and female; some seated with books in their hands, some walking, some

playing, but all conveying a certain undefined impression that they were no transitory guests. As every one did what they pleased at Letcombe Hall, it was called by some folks "Holiday House;" but there were people of a cynical turn, who, in allusion to the heterogeneous character of its inmates, termed it the "Menagerie."

What struck one most, perhaps, as one watched these persons all enjoying themselves in the sunshine (if idleness is enjoyment), was the absence of child-life. The laugh of a child would have cleared the moral atmosphere about this Castle of Indolence, which, truth to say, hung somewhat heavily on it. But, alas! there were no children at Letcombe Hall. As a young gentleman, to whom we have already been introduced, was wont to say of the place, "It was magnificent, no doubt, but too much like a first-class mad-house."

The building itself was of immense proportions, and, being quite white, shone like a star for many a mile. Round three fourths of it ran a gigantic stone veranda on pillars of stone, so that all the rooms below were cool on the hottest of summer days, and every room above had a spacious balcony.

Before reaching the front-door Mrs. Sotheran met more than one group of people and several pairs, all of whom seemed to recognize her. She acknowledged their salutations, but hurried on with frightened looks, without exchanging a word with them. Always shy and retiring, she was on the present occasion extremely apprehensive of meeting a certain person; a fear, as it happened—like most of this poor lady's fears—entirely groundless. She had a habit, however, common enough with persons of her type, of endeavoring to meet her terrors half-way, as if, by so doing, they could be mitigated; and this it was which caused her to inquire, having rung the front-door bell with a trembling hand, whether the master of the house was within.

"No, ma'am," returned the butler, with severe civility. "Mr. Paton left for town this morning."

Mrs. Sotheran uttered a sigh of intense relief, which, indeed, shaped itself into the words "Thank Heaven!" She looked so grave and earnest that the man added,

"Some of Mr. Paton's people are to follow by the next train. Perhaps they can take a message."

"No, no, *no!*" returned Mrs. Sotheran, eagerly. If she could have contrived that they should tell him that she had *not* called, that was the statement she would have confided to them. "I will see your mistress."

"Mrs. Paton has gone with master to London," returned the butler.

"Gone! Mrs. Paton gone!" This was terrible and quite unexpected news. The mistress of Letcombe Hall scarcely ever left it, and when she did so it was for the Continent. London, for certain reasons, of which Mrs. Sotheran was fully cognizant, was distasteful to her.

"Miss Gwynne is within," continued the man, taking compassion on the visitor's evident distress; "but, as you have doubtless heard, Miss Gwynne is about to leave the Hall."

"I know, I know," said Mrs. Sotheran. She did know that the young lady alluded to, Mrs. Paton's companion, was no longer on the establishment, since she was going to be married to the vicar of the parish, but she was not really thinking about Miss Gwynne at all.

"And when is your mistress expected back?"

"In about three weeks, I believe, ma'am."

Mrs. Sotheran nodded and turned away; she had hardly strength enough even to nod, while the information she had just received had literally taken her breath away. Three weeks of self-dependence—which was self-torture—therefore awaited her! Three weeks of unaided reflection! For to write of Mary's letter to the person it mainly concerned she felt was impossible. To commit such a thing to paper was, or might be, "publication;" from which she shrank as though it involved ten actions for libel. If she had but had Mary's letter yesterday, half the burden would have by this time been off her shoulders; but, as it was, she must needs bear it alone, and it seemed to crush her to the earth.

On her return, she had to run the gantlet of the guests at the Hall, but this time she felt no embarrassment: in the presence of a great fear, the minor emotions sink into insignificance. To all outward appearance, she was now

as little troubled with *mauvaise honte* as these ladies and gentlemen themselves, whom the departure of their host and hostess had affected not in the least.

Mr. Beryl Paton was often away from home. Letcombe Hall was like the decapitated lady in the German story—everything went on just the same as though it had not lost its head. As for Mrs. Paton, though one or two ordinary folks besides Mrs. Sotheran had a genuine regard for her, she was considered by the company at the Hall, who were all eminent and distinguished persons, in their way, as a nonentity.

CHAPTER XIV.

BLACK TUESDAY.

THE Tuesday on which poor Mrs. Sotheran's repose at Letcombe Dottrell was so rudely broken in upon by Mary Marvon's letter was also a black Tuesday for some other acquaintances of ours. Though Mr. Ralph Dornay had fulfilled his nephew's mission so successfully in Park Lane (not forgetting that little incidental stroke of business on his own account), all was not rose-color with him. He was under a promise to return forthwith to the Aglaia Club, to inform his young relative how he had sped upon his errand; and this was not an agreeable thing to look forward to. He had done what he had been required to do, it was true, but he had also slightly exceeded his instructions. As to his wooing of the widow, that was his own affair, and one, moreover, that was not likely to transpire very quickly; but the consciousness that he had intrusted her with Mary Marvon's letter made him a little uncomfortable, not because of the breach of trust involved in it, but of the possible consequences. Uncle Ralph took it for granted that Mrs. Beckett would read the letter, and that then there would be a row with Mary. Of course, Mary would stick to Edgar. She knew too well on which side her bread was buttered to do otherwise, and she would certainly inform him that Mrs. Beckett

had been his uncle's postmistress. An explanation of that circumstance would then be demanded of him, and Ralph foresaw that there might be a serious misunderstanding—he even termed it, as he revolved the idea in his own mind, “a rough and tumble”—with his young relative.

The ties of blood, as we know, were dear to him; if the phrase “thicker than water” was to be erased from his vocabulary it would be a serious hiatus; but still that might even happen, and welcome, if he could only make sure of the widow. He had made a great step towards that goal, but he had not reached it. And of the truth of the proverb that “there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip” he had had a very recent experience in Edgar's own case. It behooved him, for the present, at least, like a villain in a melodrama, “to dissemble.”

Anything less like a villain than Mr. Ralph Dornay looked, however, as he entered the apartment at the Aglaia Club common to himself and nephew, it was difficult to imagine. His jaunty step, his assuring smile, and the cheerfulness of the tone in which he said, “Edgar, my boy, I congratulate you,” all spoke of a mind at ease, and of the consciousness of benefits conferred upon a fellow-creature.

“What a capital fellow you are!” cried Edgar, taking his outstretched hand and pressing it eagerly. “You've seen her, of course?”

“I should rather think I had.”

“Well, what am I to do? When am I to come? I can't see her in Park Lane, of course.”

“Well, I should think not. What the deuce should you want to see her for?”

“Want to see her for? What a question. Of course I want to see Mary.”

Then Uncle Ralph perceived his mistake.

“Oh, the girl,” he said; “I thought you meant the widow—it was the widow, you will be good enough to remember, to whom you sent me; I did not go to her on my own account.”

“Of course not; I had forgotten,” said Edgar, turning very red. “So the widow's all right, is she?”

"I hope she is ; I did my very best for you, but let me tell you it was a very ticklish job. That is, I mean, it looked so. However, as it turns out, it was all a mistake."

"What was a mistake? That she asked me to marry her?"

In the excitement of the moment Edgar forgot that he had never disclosed this fact to his uncle.

"If she did that it most certainly was a mistake, a very great mistake," said Uncle Ralph, gravely. "I think, however, that must have been a conclusion, Edgar, which—ahem!—" Here he hesitated ; the sentence was difficult to round, but, nerved perhaps by some association of ideas, he presently added, "which you must have rather jumped at."

"Well, well, the point is that you have got me out of it," said Edgar, impatiently. "It would certainly have been a terrible business to have become entangled with a woman of that kind. I confess I should not like to have been ticketed 'Fortune-hunter' for the rest of my days, which would most certainly have happened."

"Considering the great disparity in your years, no doubt disagreeable things might have been said," admitted Uncle Ralph.

"The disparity in years was nothing, my good sir ; on the contrary, that would have been something to the credit side of my account : it was my want of money that made it so dreadful."

"Want of money is always dreadful," replied Uncle Ralph ; "people who have got lots of it don't understand that. You should have seen Mrs. Beckett tear that check of yours to pieces ; it would have been just the same had it been a £500 note. However, her little feeling of irritation was soon over."

"Indeed!" said Edgar, dryly. He was glad that he was free, but he would not have been displeased had his enfranchisement cost the widow a struggle.

"Yes ; she said that such a misapprehension on your part was an impertinence, but that young men would be young men."

"Which, no doubt, was her objection to them," said Edgar, cynically.

"It was a very natural objection to them in one in her position," returned Uncle Ralph, who thought he saw an opportunity of hinting without offence at his own recent proceedings. "If Mrs. Beckett ever marries again, it would be, as she gave me to understand, some person of mature years and good connections, but with nothing particular about him which should cause her to be talked about in any way."

"Such a person as Mr. Ralph Dornay, for example," observed Edgar, scornfully.

"She might do worse," said Uncle Ralph, with a slight flush; "indeed, but for me (as we have seen) she *would* have done worse."

Edgar Dornay knew something of women, but a great deal about men. "So, so: you have been making a stepping-stone of your prostrate friend to higher things, have you, Mr. Ralph?" he said, with bitter significance. "However, *my* honor is not concerned in *that* matter. Did you give my note to Miss Marvon?"

"I left it for her, sir." Here there was a knock at the door; it was generally Uncle Ralph who said "Come in," as he performed all other little offices that took trouble off his nephew's shoulders. But he now turned to the window, and playing on the pane with his fingers, began to whistle a popular melody. Edgar opened the door himself, and took a note from the servant's hand. At the sight of the superscription his heart went pit-a-pat, just as though, instead of being a member of the Aglaia Club, which, to say truth, was a somewhat "used-up" and *nil admirari* society, he was a young man from the country receiving his first epistle from his Dulcinea. He felt inclined to put his hand in his pocket and (though contrary to the regulations of the establishment) give the waiter who brought it a sovereign. Fortunately, he restrained himself, or he would certainly have regretted his generosity.

"DEAR SIR,—Mrs. Beckett has just handed me your letter, as well as your note of Saturday addressed to herself. I have no more to say to you save that I wish you well.

Yours sincerely,

"MARY MARVON."

Edgar turned upon his uncle like a wild-cat.

"You are a most infernal scoundrel, Mr. Ralph Dornay!"

"Sir—Edgar—you must have lost your senses."

"No, sir; so far as you are concerned, at least, I have found them. If there is one word of truth in you, answer me this. To whom did you give my letter to Mary?"

"To herself, of course. That is to say," he stammered, "I would have done so had I had the opportunity. She was out, and so I left it for her."

"In whose hands? You gave it to Mrs. Beckett. You may deny it or not, as you please; I say, you gave it to Mrs. Beckett."

Edgar Dornay piqued himself on his aristocratic immobility; but his manner just now had anything but that "repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere." Uncle Ralph, however, was not afraid of him; to do him justice, he was no coward.

"I had no alternative," he answered, quietly; "she insisted upon it; you have no idea what a state she was in."

Edgar Dornay flung open the door, and pointing to the staircase, exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, "Go!"

"Pooh! pooh! my good fellow," said the other, bestowing his massive frame in an arm-chair, from which it would have been difficult to remove him without mechanical appliances, "if you talk of going, the notice to quit must come from me. If you choose to step down to the manager's room, you will find that the registered occupant of these apartments is myself, and that you are only a lodger."

Edgar paused. For one moment he thought of precipitating himself upon Uncle Ralph and administering that mysterious punishment called "condign" upon his portly person, but more prudent counsels prevailed.

"You treacherous blackguard!" he simply said, and walked out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Uncle Ralph drew a long breath, and wiped his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief.

"There, that's over," he muttered. "I've burned my

boats. I had no idea that Edgar had such a temper. He has not behaved like a gentleman, much less like a Dornay. It is plain that that girl has been comparing letters and rejected him. The words applied to me by my own nephew were 'treacherous blackguard.' How true it is," he added, as he lit a cigar, "that women are at the bottom of every mischief in this world!"

Nevertheless, though he took things with such philosophy, neither that evening nor the next day were such as could be marked with white in the calendar of Uncle Ralph. We can also imagine that the feelings of his nephew, Edgar, houseless, and for the present compelled to put up with such accommodation as could be afforded by a hotel, were not very enviable.

At Beckett House, too, matters were very melancholy. Mr. Rennie was away from London on business, drawing up marriage-settlements for some country client, or assisting, with the same imperturbable face, at his interment, and would not be at home till the next day, so that both Mary's letter to him and that of Mrs. Beckett necessarily remained unanswered. The two women sat alone and apart, revolving many things in their sad hearts. There were no visitors except Mr. Ralph Dornay, who came to luncheon with the widow, as agreed upon.

She sat with him in the dining-room for some time after the meal was over, as she had sat with Edgar three days ago, but with very different feelings. She had quite resolved to marry Uncle Ralph, and told him so, without the least embarrassment or reserve; but he was not so foolish as to indulge in raptures. Like the young lady in humble life chronicled by Mr. Locker, who thought in her humility that matrimony was "too good for the likes of her," he was really somewhat overwhelmed by his own good-fortune, and this feeling gave him the very manner which was, perhaps, under the circumstances, the most agreeable to the widow. Sir Walter Raleigh, after that successful sacrifice of his cloak to the mud, might have so behaved himself to Queen Elizabeth. The widow told him frankly that it was her intention to remain her own mistress and have the spending of her own money, and that in case of her demise he would by no means find him-

self a millionaire. A less intelligent lover would have protested that, if death took her from him, wealth or poverty would be equally indifferent to him; but Uncle Ralph only said that whatever arrangements she might choose to make would be acceptable to him, and would, in any case, be far beyond his deserts or expectations.

"There is only one thing," he said, gravely, "which I have to regret in this hour of happiness: I am afraid it will cost me my nephew's affection."

The widow looked at him with angry eyes, as though she would have said, "What if it does?"

"You see, he has not only lost you, madam, but through his very foolish and injudicious conduct he has also lost Miss Marvon."

"She has rejected him, has she?" flashed out the widow. It was for her the happiest moment of the interview.

"Yes, she has rejected him; and he lays his misfortunes at my door, because I gave you his letter to Miss Marvon."

This was Uncle Ralph's best stroke. Mrs. Beckett knew the value set by him upon "family connections," and appreciated what he had done accordingly. He had actually laid her under an obligation.

"You will not have to regret, Mr. Dornay," she said, with a magnificent significance, "the having risked a quarrel with your nephew for my sake."

"I shall certainly never regret it," he replied, with an inclination of his head and a drop in his voice. "'Blood is thicker than water,' but there are claims which are even less to be denied than those of kindred."

This speech, on which Uncle Ralph plumed himself very much, was, unhappily, lost upon the widow, who had by this time—so swift and slantwise are the thoughts of women—lost sight of him and his self-sacrifice altogether.

"She communicated with him, I suppose, by letter?" observed Mrs. Beckett, abruptly.

"She? Who? Oh! Miss Marvon. Yes. She gave it him pretty stiff, I fancy."

Uncle Ralph had been so utterly thrown off his guard by the widow's change of front, that he forgot to keep

up his heroic vein; while, moreover, the remembrance of his nephew's behavior disinclined him to mince matters.

"Mary has plenty of spirit," observed Mrs. Beckett, approvingly. She would have been better pleased if Edgar had jilted Mary; but, even as it was, there was much to be thankful for. However it had come about, Mary was not going to have him. From that moment remorse for her treatment of the young girl awoke in her breast. She would have settled a thousand a year on her at once with a great deal of pleasure.

Unhappily, however, one cannot liquidate everything by check.

As Mrs. Beckett and Mr. Dornay passed through the hall, on their way up-stairs, who should be standing there, hat in hand, but Mr. Charles Sotheran. The meeting was most embarrassing for the widow, but she smiled and held out her hand to him in the old way.

"Why, Charley, what brings you here?"

"Oh, nothing," he stammered; "that is, as I was crossing the Park, I just looked in. They told me you were not at home. It's of no consequence."

"There must have been some mistake in your case, though, it is true, I did deny myself to ordinary visitors," said the widow, quietly. "What is it, Simmons?"

My lady's maid, having just descended from the upper regions, was standing in the door-way that led from the servants' rooms, with a hesitating look.

"Only a message from Miss Marvon for Mr. Sotheran, my lady: her kind regards, but she feels too indisposed to see him."

"Yes, I know poor Miss Marvon has a headache," said the widow, addressing Charley, with an assuring smile. "Perhaps another day."

"Just so; I'll call again," said Charley, retiring with much precipitation.

It was not to be expected that the young man should have his wits so much at command as a lady of fifty and of fashion; but he was an intelligent fellow, and could give a shrewd guess at what had happened.

"By Jingo! there *has* been a row," was his muttered exclamation, as soon as he found himself on the outside

of the front-door. "She called Mary 'Miss Marvon.' But what can be the meaning of that mediæval Adonis being alone with Mrs. Beckett when she is denied to visitors? She surely never *can*—"

He did not complete the sentence, because some picture presented itself to his mind (which was of a humorous cast) that caused him to burst into a roar of laughter.

Mrs. Beckett heard it, for it came through the open window into her drawing-room; but, luckily for Charley, or even perhaps for Uncle Ralph, she did not guess its cause.

CHAPTER XV.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

ON Wednesday morning Mary got her letter from Letcombe Dottrell. She had not much hope that it would do otherwise than confirm her fears as to her parentage; still, she had a hope. To the philosopher it is, or should be, a matter of no consequence by what means he comes into the world; it is one of those questions which does not concern him personally at all, but is peculiar to the preceding generation. But then we are not all philosophic. No man, indeed, who is not a fool, thinks any less of a fellow-creature because of his birth at all, since it is a matter beyond his own control. But, unhappily, there are so many fools among us that they form a sort of spurious public opinion, such as prevails in schools which are said to have a "bad tone." It is impossible, indeed, for persons who have the bar sinister on their shields not to be aware of the prejudice that exists against them among this class of persons; and if they are of a sensitive disposition, it rankles in them, as though a man should blush for shame because he hears it whispered, "that fellow has red hair." Mary Marvon, for example, felt that it would be a great aggravation of her unhappy lot in the world to find herself illegitimate.

"MY DEAR MARY" (wrote Mrs. Sotheran),—"Your let-

ter has distressed me beyond expression. If I am to answer your most painful question by the simple 'yes' or 'no' which you request of me, I must needs say 'yes;' for, alas! it is true that you are illegitimate. I cannot, however, confine myself to that bald statement of fact; and, on the other hand, I scarcely know how much, or how little, I ought to say. The circumstances of your birth are known only to myself and one other living person; they are a secret which I am under a solemn promise never to disclose; but this much I may tell you, or, rather, since you insist upon learning 'your true position in the world,' I needs must: your parents were of a widely different social rank, but have long gone to that world where there are no such distinctions. They have passed, remember, beyond our judgment. It is no longer necessary to be just when you think of them, but only to be kind and pitiful. Your mother, though she sinned through love, is now an angel. As sure as there is a heaven, Mary, she is there. Your father—well, I will only say of him that your mother forgave him the wrong he did her, and loved him to the last. It was from the apprehension, my dear girl, that you might press me upon this unhappy subject, that I have not done for you all I might have done; that, in particular, I have seemed to fall short (for one thing) in the exercise of hospitality towards you. And yet (though I cannot explain this matter) I was not prompted in this by selfish motives only. As regards your future prospects, I may say that they are somewhat better than you have been led to expect. I thought it best—I have done everything for what I thought was for the best, believe me—to make little of your expectations; but as a matter of fact you will be always out of the reach of want. A member of your father's family has hitherto supplied the means for your maintenance—not grudgingly, but as a cheerful giver—and will continue to supply it."

"Never," exclaimed Mary, striking the letter vehemently with a passionate hand—"Never, so help me Heaven, will I take one farthing from that source!" Her face was suffused with a burning blush. Her very heart seemed hot with shame.

“For your present necessity,” continued Mrs. Sotheran, “in case you may be in want of money, I enclose five five-pound notes, of which I have a store in trust for you. Charley will see you to-morrow concerning a temporary home; there are some good people from this parish who let lodgings in London, with whose address he will furnish you. It is terrible that you should be driven from your present quarters so suddenly, so unreasonably, so unjustly; but I can see that you must leave them without delay. Mrs. Beckett has not written to me—a sure sign (if I needed it) of her being in the wrong in this matter. What she told you she had no right to say, in any sense. She did not know it to be true, since, as I have said, only one person besides myself is in possession of the secret of your birth. Oh, Mary! believe that my heart is with you, though I have no words to say so. And if there is no counsel in this letter such as you have a right to look for, do not suppose that it will not come; but I must have time to think and plan what is best to be done.

“Ever yours,

“JANE SOTHERAN.”

The effect of Mrs. Sotheran's letter upon Mary Marvon, although its contents had been anticipated, and therefore discounted, was peculiar. It softened her heart towards her unknown mother, and awoke in her all sorts of tender feelings towards the poor and unprotected of her own sex, such as even her charity had not previously included; but it hardened her against her father. Mr. Beryl Paton would have highly approved of her sentiments in this respect. The tie of blood, so far from its having any cementing quality with her, had an attraction of repulsion. She dwelt upon it in spite of herself, but she never wished to hear it spoken of by others. If Mrs. Sotheran could have looked into her heart she would have had no fear of an embarrassing question from her young friend's lips; on the subject of her birth they were henceforth sealed. It was a satisfaction to her to reflect that Mrs. Beckett had no real knowledge of the matter, and she was less angry with her for her pretence of possessing it than she would have been had she actually done so.

Again, though Mrs. Sotheran's communication pained her in some respects, it acted as a tonic, strengthening her to endure the hardness of others. She had learned within that last half-hour to suffer and be strong. The world had no longer any joys to offer, but she had henceforth one passionate desire—to make herself independent of it. It was terrible to her to reflect that she had hitherto been supported by her father's relatives; it seemed to her like living on the wages of her mother's shame. From whose hand she had received them she had no curiosity to inquire. Mrs. Sotheran's assurance that they had been ungrudgingly given awoke no sentiment of gratitude. If the donor imagined that he had made reparation to her for another's wrong he was mistaken. The desire of her soul was to work till she had earned the whole sum to the last farthing, and then to fling it back to him. She would have liked to put those five five-pound notes into an envelope and return them by the next post, but she felt that her possession of them would the sooner enable her to repay the whole debt. She had already a plan in her mind for gaining a maintenance, but money was necessary for her to start with. Mrs. Beckett's check would, indeed, suffice for that; but these twenty-five pounds, being the exact sum she needed for a certain purpose, would give her an immense advantage in her race for wealth.

Mrs. Sotheran's allusion to counsel to come was as clear as daylight to her. It was evident that that person was not at hand from whom it was natural that she should seek advice, and without whom, in material matters, she could not stir. That person would never be troubled for help or counsel any more. As for Mrs. Sotheran, Mary felt nothing but love and gratitude for her; albeit she had not seen the tears which that poor lady had shed over her own communication, and knew nothing of the pains and labor she had spent upon it, with a result far from satisfactory to herself; for her reflection, when all was said, had been similar to that indulged in by the gentleman in liquor—"too much, yet not enough."

From her window, which commanded a view of Park Lane, Mary presently saw Mr. Rennie arrive in a hansom.

He did not come up-stairs for many minutes, during which she waited for him with a calmness which amazed herself. It arose, perhaps, from the fact that she had come to the end of her emotions. She had gone through so much within the last twenty-four hours that only the dregs of feeling were left within her. There was nothing more of moment—or what seemed to her of moment—to be discussed. She could trust Mr. Rennie's discretion, if not his delicacy, not to pry into matters that would give her pain. She had heard him converse with Mrs. Beckett, upon matters connected with her two marriages, with the most admirable adroitness, which he owed partly to experience in his profession, partly to his own good taste, and partly to the fact that he had long disencumbered himself of curiosity; and she took it for granted that his present delay was caused by her hostess, who had waylaid him upon his way to her.

(Here she was wrong. The lawyer had business with the widow, as we know, upon her own account, though it was true there was no great hurry about that. She was not so eager now concerning those matrimonial arrangements respecting Uncle Ralph as she had been when they concerned his nephew.)

Of course Mrs. Beckett would tell the story of their quarrel in her own way; but Mary had confidence in the lawyer's astuteness to see through what was false in it; and if he did not do so, what did it matter? What did anything matter? Still, when she heard Simmons's step upon the stairs, followed by a heavier tread, the bruised heart of the poor girl beat more quickly. Though she had been beaten on the wheel so long she had not had her *coup-de-grace*; she was still sensitive to pain. The door opened. "Please, ma'am, Mr. Sotheran, to see you." It was Charley.

The young man was very pale, and wore a look of distress and pain that was very foreign to his countenance.

"Good heavens, Mary! what is this?" he inquired, in tender yet excited tones.

"What is what?" said Mary. Her words were cold and hushed as falling snow. She had become frigid in a moment. It was the miracle of Pygmalion reversed. The

sight of him, strange to say, had at once brought Edgar and her dead love to her remembrance. To speak of him in this young man's presence was impossible.

"Why, your going away—your quarrel with Mrs. Beckett," continued Charley. "Is it not true, then, what my mother writes me?"

"That there has been a quarrel? No. That I am going to leave Beckett House? Yes. We have agreed to part, that is all. It is a subject I cannot discuss."

"Of course not; why should you do so? As though I did not know on whose side the fault lies!"

"There was no fault, Charley."

She could not ignore his partisanship, or rather, the affection that prompted it; but it pained her. Perhaps he thought, now Edgar was uprooted from her heart, that he might replace him there. If so, it was a mistake indeed; nothing would ever grow where that love had grown. Still, Charley meant kindly.

"There was no fault," she answered; "or, rather, I should say there were faults on both sides. Mrs. Beckett said things which she should not have said—which, perhaps, she already repents of saying—and I forgot, in my anger, that she had previously shown great kindness to me."

"It did not cost her much, and she could afford it," said Charley, bitterly; "moreover, she was repaid ten times over, as I mean to tell her. For once in her life she shall hear the truth."

"Charley, Charley! remember what you owe her."

"I do," he answered, grimly. "I am going to give her a present in return for it—a piece of my mind, as a parting gift."

"You speak like a boy, and a spoiled boy," said Mary, severely. "I will not urge that, in doing as you propose, you will deprive yourself of a powerful friend, for such an argument would only make you more obstinate. You imagine that you are about to make a self-sacrifice, instead of which you are merely about to indulge your inclination and flatter your own independence by a display of indignation. I am willing to believe," she added, more mildly, touched by his pained look, "that you are also actuated

by a regard for myself : if that be so, you will show it best by taking no action in this matter, which concerns Mrs. Beckett and myself only."

"I will never do anything you do not wish, Mary," answered the young man, humbly.

The diplomacy of this rejoinder, though the probate clerk did not know it, would have done credit to the Foreign Office ; for in showing his obedience to Mary's behest he had delicately indicated his own devotion.

"In the letter from my mother," he went on, "she spoke of Mrs. Wilder, who used to be at Letcombe Dottrell, and who has apartments to let near Russell Square. It is not so fashionable as Park Lane, but very convenient." Here the young man blushed, from the consciousness that he lodged within a few streets of the house in question. "I have been to look at the place this morning : it will be a great change from this, I need not say." And he looked round the walls of the bright little room with a half-sigh.

"I can get on without leather picked out in gold, and a dado," said Mary, smiling ; "but I am afraid even Mrs. Wilder's establishment will be beyond my means, Charley."

"Oh, no ; here are her terms." He produced a card : "It's as cheap as—I mean, quite cheap and *clean*," he said, with an earnestness born of his narrow escape from the vulgar metaphor. "They're country people, you know."

"A thousand thanks ; I'll think about it, and let you know, Charley."

"Do, Mary ; remember, it's very convenient. Can I do anything more for you—*anything*?"

"No, Charley, not at present. I must wish you good-bye now. Mr. Rennie is coming to see me on business."

That gentleman, indeed, was at the door as they shook hands at parting. He shot one glance at the two young people—which erred on the side of comprehensiveness, since it took in somewhat more than had taken place—and settled down to business as the door closed.

"So you are going to 'flit,' Miss Mary?"

The abruptness of his inquiry was more than atoned for by the kindness of the lawyer's tone. It made her understand at once that, whatever the widow had said to

him, it had not prejudiced him against herself ; while, on the other hand, it freed her from all embarrassment. It was clear that no questions were to be asked.

"Yes, Mr. Rennie ; if you will be so good as to recommend some respectable lodgings I shall be deeply obliged. I felt that I had no right to trouble you on such a matter, but I had no other friend to whom I could apply."

"I should not have thought that, from what I saw just now," observed the lawyer, with a twinkle at the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, as to Charley," said Mary, with the least tinge of a blush, "he is scarcely old enough to be an adviser. I never even thought of him. He called upon his own account ; that is, in consequence of a letter from his mother."

"To be sure. Mrs. Sotheran is of course aware of your intention to change your quarters."

"Yes ; she has suggested that I should make use of some acquaintance of hers who lets lodgings ; but her terms are too expensive ; very far, indeed, beyond my means."

"I should have thought Mrs. Sotheran would have been as good a judge of that matter as yourself ; being a house-keeper, perhaps even a better judge."

"Every one knows his own affairs best," said Mary, stiffly.

"That is a principle which no lawyer can admit for a moment, my dear young lady. However, let us grant it, to save time. I know one or two lodging-houses that are not dens of thieves. It is a question of price. What do you wish to pay a week ?"

Mary named so small a sum that the lawyer almost opened his eyes. "I shall not require a sitting-room," she explained, hastily. "You must know that I have a very slender purse."

"Young people do not always understand their own position," said the lawyer, gently ; "it is true that they generally exaggerate their revenues, but sometimes they are unnecessarily cautious."

"I understand my own position perfectly well, Mr. Rennie."

There was an involuntary bitterness in her tone that did not escape the other's ears.

"But you have friends—relatives, perhaps. I hope that you will reconsider the matter—for these things are serious—in case any tiff has occurred. Pray do not think me impertinent ; I speak as a friend."

"No doubt ; I thank you for it ; but I assure you that you are mistaken. There is no one on whom I have the slightest claim. I am quite alone in the world. The kindness you have always shown me emboldened me to ask your advice. I heard you mention on one occasion the case of some young lady who earned her living by copying pleadings by a certain method so as to be as clear as print."

"To be sure, by the type-writer—an ingenious machine, but very dear."

"I have the money to buy one ; and, from what you said, I think I could quickly learn to use it."

"It is a poor way of getting a living, Miss Marvon."

"It is not so remunerative as being a *prima donna*, no doubt, but then I have no voice," said Mary, smiling. "If you would put me in the way of purchasing such a machine, and of securing a respectable lodging, you would greatly oblige me, Mr. Rennie."

"Your first request is easy enough ; as to the second, I do know of such a place," said the lawyer, thoughtfully ; "it is a boarding-house for ladies only. That is so far suitable, and no one is expected to take a private sitting-room. The proprietor, one Tidman and his wife, are honest, kindly folk ; but the fare, I dare say, is not very luxurious, nor the apartments over well furnished." And Mr. Rennie looked round the room with a sense of contrast in his eye, as Charley had done when recommending Mrs. Wilder's establishment.

"Beggars must not be choosers," said Mary, "or, I should say, rather," she added (with what the professors of the art of self-defence call "quick recovery"), "that persons who have to make their own way in the world, and who find fault with plain living and simple accommodation, do not deserve to make it."

The lawyer smiled. He had always liked his glass of port and two high pillows.

“And are you in a great hurry to migrate, my dear young lady?”

“Yes; I should like to do so to-day, if possible.”

“Very good. If a bower is vacant in the Tidman paradise you shall hear from me in a couple of hours. You will not forget, however, when you are translated into it”—here he held out his hand in farewell—“that you have still friends on earth.”

“I shall never forget you, Mr. Rennie, nor your kindness to an orphan girl.”

“Tut, tut! don't talk like that; it's true, I've done nothing for you, but the very suggestion is injurious to my profession. The widow and the orphan are its natural prey.”

As he spoke the last words he turned his back to her; an act—for she was weeping—that showed more true politeness than ten thousand bows and simpers.

“What a kind man he is!” thought poor Mary, left to herself, “and how delicate it was of him to forbear to press me with interrogations. A woman would never have been satisfied till I had told her all, or quarrelled with me for not telling her.”

“It's a sad case,” muttered the lawyer, as he drove away; “I saw, from the first glance at her face, that compromise was out of the question. Mrs. Beckett would have been glad enough of it; she will soon wish she had her ‘companion’ back again, poor silly woman, instead of the other; but the girl is made of sterner stuff. ‘I am quite alone in the world,’ she said. ‘There is no one on whom I have the slightest claim.’ That's a strong thing to say and to *feel*, as I could see she did. I have never known any one who has not had a claim, real or imaginary, on somebody. The poor girl must be illegitimate.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PHILANTHROPIST.

IN London, which is equal to half a dozen great towns clubbed together, there *are* half a dozen great towns, each so different from the rest that it might well be in another hemisphere. In some quarters, notably in the vicinity of the Victoria Station, where blocks of buildings, each emulating an *hôtel-de-ville*, are numerous, the astonished visitor exclaims, "How foreign!" but in the district I have in my mind he would make use of no such ejaculation. There is nothing like it, either on the Continent or anywhere else: it is unique. Nor is that circumstance to be regretted. The streets are narrow; the shops mean and dirty; and the neighborhood is low. And the people, "Ah! the people." It cannot, indeed, be said of them, in the words of the poet, that—

"They are neither man nor woman,
They are neither brute nor human:
They are ghouls—"

but they are certainly very peculiar. "The British shibboleth" of which Byron wrote is in all their mouths, but by no means spoken with the British accent. It is only the female portion of the inhabitants that is native; the male is polyglot. Every nation under heaven, provided only it has a seaboard, has here its representatives. That they are of the earth earthy, in the spiritual sense, is only too true; but, materially, they are of the sea marine; and everything in the district smells—and smells very badly—of their calling. Flags flutter from every house-top as well as from the masts that tower everywhere above the chimney-tops; nautical instrument makers, outfitters, ship purveyors abound. These represent the export trade of the place; but the imports are much more remarkable. Shell shops, heathen idol emporiums, wild beast menage-

ries, are as numerous as the establishments for the sale of taffy and penny fiction elsewhere. Fiction is here at a discount; no one reads it, though for the raw material of it there is a glut in the market. Who can behold yonder swart, ear-ringed Spaniard, that ringleted Italian, that shivering Lascar (bound for the opium-shop), without the suggestion of a story, not, perhaps, altogether suitable for family reading. Negroes, Norsemen, Frenchmen, all as far apart in character as in clime, but with one thing common to all, a rolling gait—for each has his sea-legs on. Very good fellows some of them, no doubt; but others, as one cannot help imagining, pirates or sea-robbers, murderers of apprentices, plunderers of passengers, scuttlers of ships. This, however, may be a morbid fancy. To the æsthetic mind it is difficult to think evil of men who wear rings in their ears, and are devoted to the fair sex. Of the latter fact there can be no question, or that the tender feeling is reciprocated. There is no coyness among the ladies in this latitude, nor is the “absence of the sun” essential to the interchange of endearment; and there are some very pretty quarrels in consequence arising from the same cause which provoked the Trojan War.

Among the heterogeneous throng that crowds the narrow pavements this sultry afternoon a tall, white-bearded man is conspicuous, partly because he has no sign of the sea about him, but chiefly because he is well-dressed. It would have looked better had I written “because of his aristocratic air,” which, indeed, he possessed in a remarkable degree; but I have observed that no aristocratic air can overcome the effect of a bad hat, and it is well to give honor where honor is due. In Pall Mall this man would have attracted little attention; his long, white mustaches, hanging like stalactites from his lip; his far-sweeping beard, white and fine as spun glass, would have been set down to mere eccentricity, while his apparel would have differed little from that of others. But in the place where he now found himself the ordinary garb of a man of fashion was a stranger sight than the robe of the Lascar or the pigtail of the Chinaman. The ear-ringed, ringleted sailors; the bonnetless, slightly draped nymphs of the neighborhood “standing at the corners of the streets,”

just as they did in Jewry in King Solomon's time ; the venders of cauls and charms lounging at their shop-doors in wait for the superstitious, all turned to look at him as he strode by.

If they had known who and what manner of man he was, they would have stared harder, and not a few of them would have endeavored to make his acquaintance ; for he was in possession of wealth which in their eyes would have seemed boundless, and had a hand that was ever open to the cry of the poor. On the other hand, there was nothing strange to him in those he met. The thieving Greek and the sullen mulatto, the bland Chinaman and the grinning negro, were all familiar to him ; he had seen them, or their fathers, in their native homes, and he had seen them here. He was one of those rare citizens of the world who know their own metropolis as well as though they had been cockney-bred.

Some remarks, not altogether favorable, are made on him from time to time in a tone such as can hardly fail to reach his ear ; but, for all the notice he takes of them, they might have been addressed to Memnon. Only once or twice, when some hulking sailor stops the way, does he appear to be aware of any impoliteness ; then he walks straight on as though no such obstruction existed, his massive frame impinges on the churl's shoulder, as it seems, by accident, but in reality with scientific expertness, and the intruder is left gyrating. His shaggy eyebrows give to the still, clear-blue eyes beneath them a stern and almost fierce expression, which is intensified on these occasions as he walks on : on the other hand, when a child is in the way, his features soften ; if the toddler looks at him, a smile relaxes his mouth, and he stoops to pat some flaxen head, or drop a coin, which is not copper, into some dirty little hand, which fills the recipient with the wine of astonishment.

So he goes on his way, the observed of all observers, but apparently quite unconscious of the excitement he creates, till presently he reaches a shop over which is painted "Burzon's Museum," which is his goal.

To judge from the contents of the place, "Burzon, Astrologer," would have been the more appropriate title.

From the low, dark ceiling is suspended a stuffed alligator; on the floor lies an Egyptian mummy; and at the very entrance stand two globes, not such as the lady of newly inherited wealth and restricted education complained of as not being "a pair," for they are both celestial ones. The walls are hung with various nautical instruments, which in a landsman's eye might well be used for casting horoscopes; while the proprietor himself, in a high-peaked fur cap and a dressing-gown of doubtful color, but which might be fitly termed "the hue of ages," looked like the younger brother of "sage Sidrophel."

The respect, however, with which he received his visitor was such as it is not customary for any reader of the planets to pay to mortal man. He doffed his cap and bent his head as to no ordinary customer, and murmured in the Hebrew tongue some reverent words of welcome.

"Have you no one with you, sir?" he inquired presently, with a glance towards the door.

"No; Japhet has got a day's holiday with a friend who speaks his language."

"It is rather riskful, is it not, sir? Our folks about here are a wild lot," observed the other, deprecatingly.

"I have been used to wilder, and, for that matter, to worse," observed the other, smiling; "and though I have lived so unreasonably long, I can still hold my own with most men."

"Still, if they only knew—"

"What I had in my pocket," interrupted the newcomer. "But then, you see, they don't know. It would, as you are doubtless thinking, be much safer to transact these little affairs through a banker's hands; but I don't choose that my banker should know of them, nor any one else save Reuben Burzon."

A grateful smile lit up the dusky features of his companion.

"May the God of Abraham so serve me and mine, and worse," he answered, solemnly, "if ever I betray your honor's secrets, though he knows they are not things to be ashamed of."

"Man, however, as I have good cause to understand,"

returned the other, dryly, "takes a different view of the matter. How is Verda?"

"Well, or nearly well; here is her last letter from Berck. Her nerve, she says, which she had feared had gone forever, is coming back to her again. She has promised, according to your honor's request, never to perform again without the net."

"And her father?"

"Has ceased from all pursuit of her, and is drinking himself to death."

"That's well," returned the visitor, producing two little rolls of coin neatly packed in brown paper; "tell her not to stir from the sea-side till she is herself again. And how are the little Paris people?"

"Growing no bigger, and more popular than ever. Antoine is taking fifty pounds a week for them, which is put to their account at your honor's bankers every Saturday. I think Hébert is choked off. His attempt to farm them on the ground of being their uncle utterly failed, and the Court's decision as to the arrears has ruined him."

"But he is not in Paris? Is it impossible that he can harm the children?" inquired the old man, quickly.

"Quite impossible. He was given the alternative, as your honor suggested, of a prison or expatriation, and he is now in Sweden at his old trade."

"The ways of Heaven are marvellous," muttered the old man, knitting his shaggy eyebrows so that they formed one hairy line across his forehead.

"And as merciful as they are marvellous," returned the other.

"You think so?" observed the visitor, dryly.

"I speak as I find, and in recollection of how your honor found *me*," was the earnest reply. "I am forty years of age, so that it is two-and-thirty years ago; but I can never forget it." A shudder passed over the speaker's frame.

"I remember. Poor boy—poor boy! It was in Paris, was it not—at Montmartre?"

"Yes, sir. Never did a child suffer from the greed of man as I did. I never look at my beasts there without thinking of it. They called me the Cat-king. I can see

myself now in that dreadful cage with the wild-cats, pretending to be their tamer. How they flew over me as I cracked my little whip, and gashed my shoulder! There was nothing but my flesh-colored jacket to protect me from their cruel claws. Yet what was the pain compared with the terror of it? To this hour, when I dream of it in my sleep, I seem to wake in heaven."

"And you are still grateful, Reuben?"

"Ah, yes, I am still grateful," returned the other, taking the old man's hand and carrying it reverently to his lips. "I remember the angel that looked through my bars one day and beckoned me out, and purchased me from my tyrant."

"He was your elder brother, was he not?"

"He was my brother. But I have not yet learned to say 'God forgive him!'"

"Poor Reuben! poor Reuben! Come, let us forget him and turn to better things. Show me your wild beasts."

CHAPTER XVII.

AN INTERRUPTED BARGAIN.

THE relation between these two men, arising, in the first instance, from the rescue of the one by the other from a childhood of misery, was very curious. On the one side were affection and reverence, and a fidelity that never failed; on the other, a matter-of-fact acceptance of those offerings of the soul. The benefactor was not the benefactor of one, but of hundreds; and there were some, though, it is true, not many, who had repaid him with the like loving service; whose gratitude was not a sense of favors to come; who did not look on kindness as mere stepping-stones to fortune; and who, though they had been raised up from the humblest of positions, were content. In Reuben's eyes his visitor was an angel whom he entertained by no means unawares; whereas in those of his visitor Reuben was merely a worthy fellow in whom he confided and took some personal interest. It was not,

however, altogether to please Reuben that he had asked to see the wild animals which formed the chief portion of his stock in trade, and were the pride and joy of his existence. They had an attraction for the visitor—who had another side to his nature than that which it most commonly presented to the public—on their own account.

Physical force, agility, strength—nay, ferocity itself, perhaps, though he warred against it—had peculiar charms for him. It had been said of him, by one who knew him well, that though he was a philanthropist, he had narrowly escaped being a prize-fighter. The alliteration had been too tempting for the epigram-maker, for, as a matter of fact, money would under no circumstances have been attractive to his friend; but he was by nature greedy of combat, as well as of dauntless courage. In earlier times he would have been a free lance who would have yet disdained to be a mercenary. It would, moreover, have been necessary that the cause for which he fought should be just. On the other hand, his character was far removed from the Quixotic. His passions were strong, yet were as water unto wine in comparison with his prejudices, which were violent, unreasonable, and lasting. A cynical smile lit up his face when, upon his conductor's unlocking a crazy door that led straight out of the museum into the menagerie, he was greeted by a chorus of snarls and yells. He felt it to be a protest of the brute creation against the human, suggested by instinct, but utterly unfounded in reason, since his companion was their feeder and their friend.

The place was a mere stable, fitted for the temporary accommodation of the animals brought to Reuben from every quarter of the world for sale. Here were lions in egg-boxes (or dens that looked little stronger), and tigers in rabbit-hutches. As for the less dangerous, but still exceedingly formidable animals, such as pumas and hyenas, their cages lined the walls, between which there was but just room for a man to pass without touching them, or being touched, just as though they were fowls in Leadenhall Market. It was difficult for a nervous person to admire what presented itself to his gaze, from the consciousness of what might be pawing, scratching, or even biting

him from behind. Reuben himself, however, was no more moved by these attentions on the part of his four-footed and feathered friends than if they had been stuffed.

"There, sir, are my old acquaintances," he said, stopping and pointing to a cage which, from its slightness, seemed to be made for canaries, but which was tenanted by half a dozen wild-cats; "I give you my word that I never see them, even now, without a shudder of terror." As they were showing their sharp teeth and swearing like troopers, with every hair in their bodies, especially their tails, instinct with hate and fury, his apprehensions would have seemed to most people by no means groundless; but it was evident that he was only affected by reminiscence or association. "Think, sir, think," he went on, "what a poor child must feel on first finding himself in such company."

"Ay, and think of the company that could be gratified by seeing him there," observed the visitor, dryly.

"True, sir, true; and of the brother that could put him to such a trade—his own flesh and blood."

"Ay, ay." These monosyllables were uttered in a grating, almost menacing, tone. It was plain that it was not only the museum-keeper that was subject to the influence of reminiscence.

"What I say is, sir," continued Reuben, raising his voice above the din of screech and hiss and roar, "that these wild-cats themselves are gentle creatures compared with such a scoundrel."

"Mere purring, domestic tabbies," was the quiet reply. "I don't wish to hurry your movements, Reuben, but something is spitting at my back."

"It is only the emu, sir," answered Reuben, carelessly. "He *will* spit, whatever happens. Where he gets it all from I can't think. He beats any sailor I ever knew at that; and yet he's no tobacco-chewer, either. That's a fine creature, ain't it, sir?"

He pointed to a magnificent Bengal tiger in a wooden cage above their heads, in which he was stretching himself (he could just do it, and only just) at full length, with his huge mouth distended in a prolonged yawn.

"He looks big enough and strong enough, but he's not

in first-rate condition, is he? If he was in India, I should almost have said, from the look of his skin, that he had taken to man-eating."

Reuben looked at his patron, admiringly. "Upon my life, sir, you seem to know almost everything. The fact is," he added, dropping his voice to a whisper, "the poor beast did commit himself in that way on shipboard. It was only a Lascar, so there was not much fuss made about it; but it shows what he's made of. However, he's bespoken by a travelling caravan, where he will be well looked after."

"Not the one my poor giant has joined, I do hope," returned the other, smiling.

"No, sir, no; he's nothing to be feared on in the way of animals but a spotted woman. She'll have him in the holy bonds of matrimony, if he don't look sharp, before the year's out.—What is it, my boy?"

A sharp-looking little Jew had come in from the museum to speak with his master. "Please, sir, the Don has come. He says he will have no more shilly-shallying, but will you take the lady or will you not?"

"Very good; tell him I will be with him directly. I am afraid I must leave you for half a minute, sir," said Reuben, apologetically.

"Don't mention it," said the visitor, carelessly. "But who is the Don, and, above all, who is the lady?"

"Well, the lady's nothing, sir," returned Reuben, with a half-smile; "but as to the other, he's a very ticklish customer. They call him the 'Don' because of his looks and ways; but handsome is that handsome does, is my motto. In my opinion, this tiger here is more to be trusted. He's a Mexican, over here for no good, I reckon, though he has brought me a rare piece of merchandise that may, perhaps, turn out trumps. The finest fellow to look at as ever I clapped my eyes on, but—"

"I'll see him," interrupted the other, abruptly.

"I think it would be better not, your honor," hesitated Reuben. "If he only guessed—"

"Tchut! You needn't introduce me. A friend from the country who wants a lion; at all events, who wants to see one. Come!"

Reuben shrugged his shoulders. He knew by experience that it was vain to argue with his patron, and led the way back to the museum. A tall fellow was standing with his back to them, teasing some lizards in a glass tank. He turned round with a frown that gave way at once to an insinuating smile upon perceiving that Reuben was not alone. He had not yet arrived at middle age, and even in his formal English dress, with a coarse wide-awake which made a poor substitute in point of picturesqueness for his native sombrero, was a splendidly handsome fellow. His fine eyes sparkled like diamonds, his teeth shone like pearls; his very beard had the gloss and shimmer of silk; his smile seemed to light up his fine features like a ball-room just prepared for its guests. A caviller might have objected that there was too much of brilliancy; otherwise he looked the *beau ideal* of manly beauty. His voice was low and melodious, and the broken English in which he spoke gave it a touch of tenderness.

"I did not know you had a friend with you, Mr. Burzon," he said, raising his hat for one instant in graceful courtesy.

Reuben's patron did the like: the two men regarded one another with great intentness.

"I think we have met before," said the Englishman, in no very conciliatory tone. He had the air of one who is endeavoring to call something which is unpleasant to his own remembrance.

"It is possible; everything is possible, but it is not likely," was the airy rejoinder; "I have been but a few days in England." Then he turned to Reuben, as one who dismisses an uninteresting subject, and in a dry, quick way, observed, "Well, about the princess? Is it 'yes' or 'no'? I have other offers, and cannot afford to wait."

"This is the lady this gentleman has come about," said Reuben, throwing back the lid of a chest behind him. "She is three thousand years old, he tells me."

"And as fresh as a daisy," added the Mexican, sardonically.

The individual in question, whose face was thus dis-

closed, was very far from an attractive object. It was a mummy, though not swathed in bandages to the same extent as usual; it showed something of the human form; while the features, which were exposed, had even some tint of life. The hair, which was coal-black, remained on the skull; the lower jaw had dropped, showing the teeth and tongue. It was a weird and ghastly sight.

"You would hardly guess what that is, sir?" said Reuben, still addressing his patron.

"I have no need to guess. It is an Inca woman."

"Do you hear that?" said the Mexican, triumphantly. "The gentleman recognizes the lady. It is, you see, as I told you. Yes, she is a princess of the Incas, and dirt-cheap at fifty pounds."

"Is she yours to sell?" inquired the Englishman, quietly. "This inscription on the lid is a little suspicious."

"He told me that that was the Inca language," said Reuben, simply.

"Nevertheless, it is what is now spoken in Peru. How do you account?"—here the old man turned to the Mexican with a stern look—"for the words, 'Belonging to Government,' which I see inscribed here?"

"I account to nobody," returned the other, his face aglow with passion and his hand fingering his hip, as if for some weapon that was not in its accustomed place; "the mummy is mine. I suffer no human being to interfere with my affairs."

"Just so. You insist upon the rights of property. You were not always, however, such a conservative, if I remember right. Let us hope your ideas upon the sacredness of human life have undergone some change. You show your teeth; that is a mistake, my good sir, since it reminds those who have memories that you know only too well how to use them."

It is difficult to imagine how a handsome face can become hideous; but at these words of the Englishman the Mexican's features became not only terrible, but loathsome. Every evil passion that disfigures human nature seemed to crowd itself into one concentrated look of hate and rage as he replied, "You are safe to-day, my friend, but you will not be safe to-morrow; you may be safe to-

morrow, but you will not be safe the next day : in my country, vengeance is a dish that we eat cold."

He turned upon his heel and left the house, though not as an ordinary man under the influence of passion would have left it. He walked softly, almost daintily, to the door, then turned round to smile—such a smile as Nero might have worn when the idea first struck him to set Rome alight—and swept his hat off, in grim *au revoir*, with the air of a natural Chesterfield.

"I think you will get your Inca princess for nothing, Reuben," observed the old man, with a dry chuckle.

"I hope not, sir ; for to get it so might be to pay a great price for it," was the grave rejoinder. "That you have made that man your enemy is certain ; though why he should have flown into such a passion just because you hinted at his being a thief, passes my comprehension."

"It was not *that*, Reuben ; nobody minds one's knowing what everybody knows ; but I have some private information respecting that gentleman. I met him once in his native land, where he was in hiding among the hills. He had got into trouble, like Mr. George Barnwell, for murdering his uncle ; not that *that* is thought anything of in Mexico, but there were certain circumstances connected with his escape which rendered him unpopular. In that happy country no one is put to death for crime, but is deported to an island off the mainland, and which is the home of yellow fever. The guards are changed every three weeks, which is an expensive item ; on the other hand, no convict is alive after three months at farthest. Escape is considered impossible, as these men are manacled in pairs, and the mile of sea that lies between them and liberty is infested with sharks. Our friend the Don, however, was not one to be daunted by obstacles. He persuaded his fellow-captive to take to the water with him, and together they swam across in safety. His first act on getting to land was to kill his companion in misfortune, because he was an impediment to his own escape. But even then he had not got rid of him. The chain that united the dead with the living he found it impossible to break, and therefore he took to his teeth."

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Reuben, incredulously, "that he bit through the chain?"

"No; he remembered the fable of the file and the serpent, and did not even try it; but he bit through his dead friend's wrist, and by that means obtained his liberty. His fellow-countrymen are not purists in such matters, but though they did not go the length of giving him up to justice, they never forgave him that expedient. They nicknamed him the 'man-eater,' and that is why, I fancy, my allusion to his splendid teeth put him out of temper."

"It is no joking matter, sir," said Reuben, earnestly; "you have made a most dangerous and mortal enemy."

"I have made many such," returned the other, contemptuously, "and overlived them all. Tchut! He is not worth a glance over the shoulder. Let us look at your Japanese jars."

Reuben's museum was in some respects like human nature; side by side with some revolting things, there were in it some very beautiful objects, the worth of which was only understood by a very few persons.

"The best I have are on commission," said Reuben; "and here, as it happens, comes the very man that owns them."

While he was speaking there entered a young sailor in a red shirt.

"Well," he said, addressing Reuben, and bestowing an easy nod on the stranger, "you've been an all-fired time, you have, in selling those jars." They were very handsome jars, with a great deal of external work on them—cranes and water-fowl among reeds—and standing fully four feet high.

"This gentleman is looking at them," said Reuben, significantly, and with a look that would have imposed silence on any English vender under similar circumstances. But the new-comer was of that nation of whom it must surely have been written by prevision, "The tongue can no man tame."

"Let him look," continued the American; "they are things as can stand being looked at, them jars. A hundred and fifty pounds the pair is dirt-cheap. It's only be-

cause I am afraid of those water-birds flying clean away—for they're just as like as life—and leaving the jars plain, that I don't stand out for double the money." The possible purchaser here whispered something to Reuben, who, losing his habitual caution for the first time, replied, "Yes, Mr. Paton."

"Paton! Paton!" exclaimed the American, quickly, "I know that name. Now might you by any chance be Beryl Paton?"

"Beryl Paton is my name, sir," said the old gentleman, drawing himself up with stiffness.

"You don't say? Wal, now, that's strange. Why, I knew your son Harry when he was in New York quite well."

"Did you? Then you knew one of the greatest blackguards that ever drew breath!" with which unexpected reply Mr. Beryl Paton spat on the ground and walked out of the house, slamming the door behind him.

Never did speech intended to be conciliatory receive such unsympathetic rejoinder.

"Wal, I *am* darned!" said the Yankee. "What on airth does it all mean?"

"It means," said Reuben, with a very blank face, "that we have made two enormous fools of ourselves; I for letting out that gentleman's name, and you for having lost the best chance you will ever have of selling those jars."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DUMB ALLY.

SUCH was the turmoil of hate and passion produced upon Mr. Paton's mind by the mention of his dead son's name that he took no thought of whither he was going, but actually turned to the left hand instead of the right when he left Reuben's door. The present, with all its surroundings, was forgotten; the streets, and the motley crowd that thronged them, if they were reflected on the retina of his eye at all, conveyed no impression to his

brain ; he walked on like a man in a dream—and an evil dream. He beheld again the boy who had been the hope of his life becoming, with frightful velocity, its despair ; the flower of his pride and joy devoured by a canker-worm begotten of itself, till it perished loathsomely, leaving desolate the garden of his soul. He called to mind the seventy-and-seven times that he had forgiven his son for misdeeds that in another would have been past pardon, and the perjuries and ingratitude with which they had been repaid. Two incidents of the young man's vile and wasted life towered above all others, and cast a blacker shadow than the rest upon the tablets of unwilling memory : the one was the seduction of an orphan girl, his mother's frequent guest and life-long *protégée* ; the other, an attempt which had been within a hair's-breadth of success to put himself, Beryl Paton, into a mad-house. This was not the last straw that had broken the back of endurance—for all hope of compromise or reconciliation had long been at an end—but it was the act that had substituted for disappointment and disgust abhorrence, and had turned his angry blood to gall.

From henceforth the name of Henry Paton was worm-wood to his father : lost, but not regretted ; dead, but not forgiven ; the memory of him was like some secret sin, accursed and never to be spoken of. All who knew Beryl Paton knew this ; any one who did not know him, and who (as had just happened) by accident alluded to this painful subject, became in a manner involved in it, and shared some portion of his resentment.

A more wretched man than this master of millions, as he walked on, thinking of these things, with bent head, was hardly to be found. The Lascar he passed upon his way, in rags, and shivering in the summer heat ; the Chinamen, poor as Job and as patient, enjoyed a happier lot, for a few pence could cause them to forget their misery in an opium dram ; but for such pain as Beryl Paton suffered there was no anodyne, for such reflections no oblivion. The tumult within him was such that for hours he walked on without even consciousness of fatigue, or of the heat of the sun, which, unlike the fire within him, had indeed spent its force. He had long quitted the crowded

thoroughfares and the neighborhood of the lower docks; the streets he threaded now were narrow and squalid, and their inhabitants seemed to have quitted them for the nonce for more attractive scenes, for they were almost empty. Presently he came to a creek, crossed by a swing-bridge protected only by chains, with a small dock on the landward side. The tide was up, but there was no vessel in it. Not a human being was in sight; the road beyond led on to some marsh land, which no attempt had been made to put to any useful purpose. At this moment Beryl Paton heard rapid but stealthy footsteps behind him. He turned round with a mechanical impulse; for just then no incident, except so far that it was an interruption to his thoughts, had the slightest interest for him.

It was the Mexican, with something gleaming in his hand. The old man faced him without a tremor.

“English devil!” cried the other, as he drew near, “you will tell tales of me no more.”

“You dog with the teeth!” returned the Englishman, “you will be hung like a dog.”

He had nothing but his walking-stick, and it was by no means a stout one; but it is written even of the peaceful and occasionally fraudulent counter-jumper—being English—that on the approach of a foreign foe he will “strike with his yard-wand home;” and Beryl Paton was no counter-jumper. A man of courage from his birth, who had been face to face with death, afar from friends and home, half a dozen times, he was not a man to blanch from any personal danger, least of all when threatened by a scoundrel. What seems curious, existence, which five minutes before had appeared utterly valueless and a burden, grew suddenly precious to him. He had no expectation of preserving it, and he would have stooped to beg it of no man living, but he was resolved to sell it dearly. He was old, but the love of life was not dead within him.

It is not in those supreme moments in which are about to be decided the issues of life or death, that sublime thoughts present themselves; in personal combat the Vulgar prevails over the Heroic.

“At all events, I will spoil this blackguard’s beauty for him,” was the simple but forcible reflection that suggest-

ed itself to Beryl Paton ; but, as it crossed his mind, another thought (to judge by the expression of his face) followed it, caught it, and obliterated it. "Mexican dog!" he cried, "look behind you."

The warning would have been unheeded, or taken as a *ruse*, perhaps, but that at the same moment there was a thunder of footsteps on the wooden bridge. It was the tread of a man, but it sounded like the tramp of a horse ; one of those steeds of old, used for strength and not for fleetness, but which for a short course would carry a rider in complete mail at speed in one of those mediæval "running-down" cases which were euphuistically called "jousts." Against such an antagonist, with his steam up, the slender Mexican, notwithstanding his long knife, would have had no more chance than had Saladin pitted against the Knight of the Leopard. Before he could turn and face him this moving tower of a man was upon him, and would have crushed him like that of Siloam had he been so minded. Only, not being stone and mortar, but flesh and blood endowed with intelligence, he adopted another method : with one hand he seized the wrist of the Mexican which held the knife, with the other the nape of his neck, and forcing him to the bridge-chains, toppled him over them into the deep dock before he had time to complete an execration.

Beryl Paton folded his arms and looked on with the air of a satisfied but unexcited spectator who sees beforehand how things must end ; nor, till the splash arising from the displacement of the water had died away, did he move or speak. Then he said, with great deliberation and distinctness,

"Why, Japhet, how came *you* here?"

As quick as words, but with his fingers (for the man was a deaf mute), came the dumb response, "My mistress sent me."

Beryl Paton knit his brow.

"Her commands were, sir," the man went on, "that I was to be no spy upon your movements, but that I was always to be at hand in case of need."

"And how long have you been dogging my footsteps?"

"I followed you until you entered the shop yonder,"

returned the other, indicating the direction from which he had come, "and when you came out I followed that gentleman." Here he pointed with a contemptuous finger to the dock beneath.

"Well, well, my brave fellow, you disobeyed orders, but Nelson did the like; you have saved your master's life, Japhet;" and Mr. Paton held out his hand.

The other, a broad-faced fellow, middle-aged, but with a boyish look, caused by the absence of beard or whisker, which, contrasting with his great bulk, gave him a very peculiar appearance, took his master's hand and raised it to his lips. The movement, so strangely out of character with his appearance, was not caused by enthusiasm; it was merely the result of habit, which led him to express all emotions by signs.

"As to this murderous scoundrel," observed the old man, quietly, "the dock, if it were but at the Old Bailey, would be the very place for him; I suppose, however, one must not leave him to drown."

"As you please, sir," returned the deaf mute, with a look of indifference. "Shall I go in after him?"

"Certainly not," replied the other, quickly; "I would not risk the loss of my walking-stick for such a cur."

He leaned over the bridge, and looked down into the dock with the same sort of disgust that one might contemplate a sewer with a rat in it.

The wretched Mexican, although, as we know, a magnificent swimmer, had been injured in his fall, and after a vain attempt to keep himself afloat by paddling, had contrived to catch hold of a rusty chain that hung down the steep, slimy side, for the accommodation of boatmen. He was very quiet, no doubt from the expectation—judging from what would have been his own conduct had he been in their place—that, if discovered to be alive, his enemies would make an end of him. Nevertheless, since to let go his hold was to drown, he permitted himself to be dragged up by the chain and deposited on the bridge, where they left him without a word—a pulpy mass, attractive only to the paper-maker.

By Mr. Paton the whole affair seemed at once to be forgotten; as he turned towards home he again fell into gloomy

abstraction, and, tired as he needs must have been, would have taken no notice of a wandering cab, which by great good-luck they chanced to meet, had not his voiceless henchman drawn his attention to it by touching his arm. "I think you have forgotten, sir, that it is the club night."

"True, Japhet, true," he answered, with a look to the full as grateful as that he had worn on the occasion of the other's more practical service, and entered the vehicle.

Japhet climbed on the box beside the driver, who, perceiving that he listened with attentive silence to the history of his horse and cab, the narrative of his marriage and widowhood, and many other interesting details of his autobiography, set him down at the journey's end as "one of the right sort," and "excellent company."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SEMPITERNAL CLUB.

THE termination of the cab-drive was an old-fashioned hotel in Jermyn Street, where Mr. Paton was accustomed to stay in town in preference to occupying his own residence in Portman Square—a proceeding that would have been considered eccentric in another man, but which in his case awoke no surprise. The days of astonishment among Beryl Paton's friends had long been over.

Upon entering his sitting-room an old lady rose from her chair to welcome him, with a quickness and anxiety that contrasted strongly with her age and the general dignity of her appearance. Her hair, like his own, was white as snow, though scarcely whiter than her finely chiselled, aristocratic face, which, without doubt, would have exhibited those traces of blue blood of which we hear so much and see so little, if there had been any blood in it at all; but there was none. She gave one the impression of one of those unfortunate persons whose appearance has suffered change from calamity, such as suspense or terror. From the tone, however, in which she spoke it was evident that

she had considerable capability for distress of mind still left.

"Oh, Beryl, where have you been? I was beginning to be so nervous about you."

"Pooh! pooh! I am a little late, wench, that's all."

He went up to her and kissed her pale cheek. It was no very lordly payment for her having saved his life (which indirectly she had certainly done), but of that, of course, she was unconscious. All she knew was that, for the first time since her Harry had angered his father beyond forgiveness—now near twenty years ago—her husband had kissed her. She colored like a girl, and the tears came into her large gray eyes; she knew him too well, however, to permit herself to give way to emotion.

"Your things are laid out in your dressing-room, Beryl."

On the very rare occasions when they left home together this was always done, to the great indignation of Derwood, the valet, by Mrs. Paton's own hands. If her husband would not permit any exhibition of affection on her part, if he could not forgive her the tender sorrow with which she still regarded her dead son's memory, she could at least administer to his needs.

"There is no hurry, Rachel," returned her husband, coldly, as if he already repented of his recent display of feeling; "I have still twenty minutes in which to dress, and my fellow-guests will not be impatient."

The last words, with which he left her, were delivered with a certain grim pathos which would have been inexplicable to ordinary ears. Mrs. Paton, however, understood it very well. She sighed heavily, and, reseating herself in her chair, took from her pocket a note she had received but a few minutes before, but which she had already perused many times:

"DEAR MRS. PATON,—I am very sorry that I was not at home when you were so good as to call on me. Will you come and take afternoon tea with me at five to-morrow? We shall be quite alone. Yours very truly,

"KATE BECKETT.

"P.S.—I hear you made some inquiry as to Mrs. Soth-

eran's *protégée*. She is no longer with me, having left Park Lane some days ago, in consequence of an unfortunate disagreement, concerning which I will say at once, in order to relieve your mind, that she attached more importance to it than I did."

It was strange how such ordinary tidings, and conveyed in such a conventional style, interested this stately dame. The hand which held her double glasses, and the lips with which, after the manner of old age, she dumbly formed the words, trembled as she read them. Presently her husband's footsteps sounded from the room within; she thrust the note hurriedly into her pocket, with an affrighted look, and rose once more to greet him. He was in evening dress; but, in place of that expectation of boredom which most people of experience wear who are going out to dinner, his air was grave and full of thought.

"I am going to leave you to dine alone, Rachel," he said, slowly.

"Oh, that is of no consequence," she answered, cheerfully; "I feel it so kind of you, Beryl, to have brought me with you up to town! It seems quite to revive old days."

"I hope not," was the grim rejoinder.

The next moment he was striding across the hall to his carriage, which whirled him rapidly away. It took him to another hotel, but of a very different stamp to the one in Jermyn Street, in the neighborhood of Covent Garden. It had been a fashionable place of residence in the days of sedan-chairs and link-boys, but was now chiefly used for dining purposes. It was evident that he was expected, for the master of the house was at the door in a moment to receive him, attended by several waiters. He led the way up a broad staircase, handsomely carved, into a large, oak-panelled room, lit by many wax-candles, in which stood a dinner-table arranged for a dozen guests. It sparkled with glass and silver, but there were no floral or other ornaments such as would have been found on any modern board of equal pretensions.

"Let Merton wait," said Mr. Paton, as he took his seat in the chair of honor.

"Merton is dead, sir, I am sorry to say," returned the

landlord, with an air less of regret than of reproof, as though such an act on Merton's part had been inconsiderate, to say the least of it.

"Good heavens! is *he* dead too?"

"Well, yes, sir, I am afraid so; but there's Burton—he's used to the club; and perhaps, with a couple more, that is all that will be necessary."

Mr. Paton inclined his head in grave assent. It was very desirable that some person should be included in the service in question who was not altogether a stranger to it, for it was a very peculiar one. Although the table, as we have said, was laid for twelve persons, and the dinner provided for the same number, there was in fact only a single guest—namely, Mr. Beryl Paton himself. Every dish was handed respectfully on the left of every vacant chair, and was supposed, by no great stretch of the imagination, to be declined. The wine was proffered in a similar manner. Nor did the chairman either eat or drink as though he would have atoned for the absence of his *convives*. He tasted, indeed, of everything, and put his lips to each glass, whatever it held, but it was plain that he was only going through the form of dining. His eyes, as they wandered from chair to chair, seemed to picture for him some absent companion, and now and then an unconscious sigh would escape his lips, which spoke of regretful memory. Well might he sigh, for every chair was as a tombstone, since each recalled for him a dead friend.

It was fifty years ago since Beryl Paton, the youngest of that once jovial company, had been admitted a member of the Sempiternal Club, and he had outlived them all. It had been their grim humor never to recruit their ranks, when thinned by death, from the living, and though, year after year, they had met in diminished numbers, it was *de rigueur* that, as respected the feast itself, that circumstance should be ignored. Dinner for twelve, as at first, had always been provided, and, so far as it lay in wine and mirth to do it, the dwindling board had made head against the enemy. But as, when we get beyond middle life, and our friends who have joined the majority become more numerous than those who still remain with us, matters begin to look serious, so, as the Sempiternal Club

grew less and less impervious to the shocks of time and chance, its gatherings became less jovial. The gaps in the double line grew larger and more frequent; the ranks closed up, till now the long table stretched before the guestless chairman like a coffin. Last year he had had a single companion of nearly his own age, a man of fashion and of wit, to whom death, like all other things, had been but a subject to make merry with. Where were his gibes, his flashes of merriment, now? There was mirth in the room, indeed, though of a very different sort. Behind the screen that hid the door Mr. Burton's two assistants would sometimes run, on pretence of some official duty, but in reality to interchange their views of a proceeding which was in their eyes irresistibly jocose. "What a game it is, Bob!" one would whisper (alluding to the chairman's lonesome state, whose game, if any game, was *solitaire*), and then Bob would stuff his napkin into his mouth and lean against the wall in a paroxysm of pent-up enjoyment. Mr. Burton, standing immovable behind Mr. Paton's chair, had higher gifts. Nature had intended him for a bishop, but somehow, though he had won the apron, he had missed the mitre; not a smile betrayed his own emotions, but ever and anon he would catch the eye of one of his myrmidons in the act of offering still hock to some invisible guest, and wink with such an intensity of appreciation as drove the other to the very verge of a guffaw.

To a looker-on this vulgar by-play would have only made the sepulchral scene more sad by depriving it of its decencies. The central figure, however, was quite unconscious of it, and sat wrapped in thoughts too deep for words; he was in the world, but no longer of it, clasping the hands that had long been dust, and listening to the voices that were beyond the stars.

When the cloth, in old-fashioned way, had been removed, and the claret-jugs had been placed on the shining table—each double, jug and shadow—the chairman exclaimed, "Withdraw!" whereupon the servants left him. One of them, I am sorry to say (indeed, I should shrink from mentioning it, had not the matter become afterwards of some consequence), still kept his eye on him

through the key-hole ; otherwise he was literally alone. After a moment or two he rose, glass in hand ; his eye glanced round the table with a very sorrowful expression, and he murmured, "To the memory of the dead." His mind was with them, though his body was above the earth—not under it, as theirs were. The free-thinkers, the scholars, the wits, with whom he had conversed a hundred times on "fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute," had all gone to the place where doubts are resolved forever. Some had thought there was no hereafter, others that there might be a future world ; now all but himself knew that there was one, and what it was like. By the time he joined them (so the fancy struck him) they would all have been accustomed to their position, just as some of them, in going to college, had preceded him from school. What strange things would they have to tell him ? or would they be forbidden to tell him anything ?

His thoughts strayed back through a long vista of years, of which, by that strange inversion to which human memory is subject, the later were the least clear, while the earlier had the distinctness of yesterday. They were in connection with "The Club" alone, and quite free from that painful matter which had seized his mind that afternoon. His son had had nothing to do with the club, and, if he knew of its existence at all, had set down its members as "old fogies" not worthy the attention of a man of spirit. But to Mr. Paton they were not old fogies. Once more they were young, some of them handsome, all of them wealthy. Life lay before them, as it had lain before himself, full of pleasures that seemed inexhaustible ; the cup of enjoyment had been then but tasted, and now it was emptied to the dregs—to the very dregs.

The old man leaned forward, with his head upon his hand, and in the heart of the polished board caught sight of his own hoary face.

Good heavens ! how different were those features from those it had first reflected !

"O youth ! for years so many and sweet,
'Tis known that you and I were one ;
I'll deem it but a fond conceit—
I cannot think that thou art gone,"

sings the poet, but his imagination did not avail him ; how far less, then, can it avail those who are not poets? It was a very bitter hour.

As a rule, Beryl Paton was not given to retrospection, save when that one cross in his life of which we know was thrust upon his attention ; but present circumstances were so striking and peculiar that they mastered his mind and compelled it to review the past. He had been essentially a man of action—not much of a reader, though somewhat (in a vague way) of a thinker—and in his youth the creature of impulse. On the whole, his impulses had been good. Of late years, indeed, his life had been passed in acts of benevolence. They were not, however, those of Christian charity, as it is generally understood. At the bottom of them there lay a certain desire to redress the wrongs which Fate imposed upon his fellow-creatures, and, however good in themselves, his doings had had something of egotism and even of arrogance. It pleased him to play the part of a small Providence, and he did so with the secret conviction that his system was an improvement upon that of the Great Original—an opinion not unexampled among the very rich, though by no means so common as the idea that everything is for the very best, and needs no mending.

He could lay his hand upon his heart and honestly say that he had designedly wronged no man, and even as to woman he had not much to answer for. The consideration of personal merit, however, as regarded any reward or punishment that might be awaiting him, did not much trouble him. He had been so long not only a law unto himself, but a law-giver, the hinge on which the interests of so many others turned, that the idea of his own subordination to any higher power rarely intruded. What was most importunate with him just now was the feeling of isolation. This was partly owing, no doubt, to the sense that he had outlived his contemporaries, but not wholly so. While we have those who sympathize with us, no matter to what generation they belong, we are not isolated. But Beryl Paton was one by himself. He had, indeed, his wife, who in regard for him might almost be termed a devotee, but there was a shadow between them ; he knew

that she cherished in secret a memory that was hateful to him. He had clients by the score, and *protégés* not a few, but he had no friends. He stood alone in the world, and, worse than all, when he should fall, which in the course of nature must needs be soon, there was none to reign in his stead. And this—though he would never have owned it even to himself, since it would have given the victory to his enemy—was his bitterest thought of all. It has been said, indeed, by a philosopher, “Why regret the being forgotten, since before you lived the world went on quite well without you?”—a question that is unanswerable. Only, most of us are not philosophers, but merely men and women.

CHAPTER XX.

“TIDMAN’S.”

THERE are two signs by which, in all human habitations, the want of ready money in the proprietor may be always recognized: the one is fustiness, the other is skimpiness. In the former case there may be plenty of furniture; the beds will be bigger than they need be, each with a surplusage of curtains and four gigantic posts, the original use of which is fast fading from the mind of man. (A time will come when they will only be remembered by the metaphor, “in the twinkling of a bed-post,” and annotators will cudgel their brains in vain to explain what even *that* meant.) The carpets, though threadbare, are plentiful; the doors which do not close tightly are lined with list, to remedy that defect; the chairs, though rickety and casterless, are well cushioned; to the eye, in short, in such places everything is fairly comfortable, but the air is rather difficult to breathe. Flue is everywhere; there is a general flavor of mustiness; and when you open a window the one way to keep it open—for the sash comes down again like a guillotine—is to break it.

The second case is of a wholly different kind. “Fustiness” is the characteristic of old fashion, “skimpiness” of new. When a new house is out at elbows it does not

suffer from want of ventilation ; it may be clean as a light-house, though the damp is not always so entirely confined to the outside, but a dreadful air of incompleteness and insufficiency pervades it.

This was, unfortunately, what was the matter with Tidman's Private Hotel, Holloway, where Mary Marvon had taken up her quarters on the recommendation of Mr. Rennie. Why it was called a "private hotel," except for the reason that causes Mr. Smith to call himself Mr. Smythe, it was difficult to conjecture. It had no night chamberlain, no waiter, nor even any resident boots. The whole work of the house, and it was a large one, was done by Mr. Tidman and two "slaveys," hired maidens of tender years. They had also to wait upon Mrs. Tidman, who was "a lady in her own right," as her husband termed it, the first cousin of a baronet, the niece of a Member of Parliament, and a person altogether superior to her surroundings. It was for her sake that Tidman dubbed his establishment "Private Hotel," as being less obtrusively connected with the licensed victualling interest than "hotel" pure and simple, while it was more genteel than "boarding-house ;" but boarding-house it was, and that of a very unambitious kind. No wine was sold on the premises—a circumstance which, combined with a positive interdict upon tobacco, restricted Tidman's guests to members of the female sex ; while, on the other hand, it justified the proprietor in applying to his establishment the encomium of "exclusive." The guests were mostly permanencies. Folks did not come to Tidman's by misadventure ; they did not, on finding Claridge's full, fall back discontentedly in their barouches with C springs and murmur, "Try Tidman's." Tidman's had a connection of its own, mostly among country ladies of limited means, and was never "tried," though it was sometimes found wanting. The two Misses Blithers, of Bath, for example, who at present occupied its principal apartments, used to turn up their noses at some of its bedroom arrangements ; Miss Fandango, of the West India Islands, who talked of them as if they belonged to her, and who had certainly an hereditary estate on one of them, though it was doubtful if it had anything on it, used to smile bitterly at the brown

sugar, which did *not* remind her of any native clime. It was in the case of these detractors that the uses of the lady of the house (which would otherwise have remained unsuspected) became manifest. She would inform the Misses Blithers, upon the personal authority of a first cousin of a baronet, that green blinds were not essential to the furniture of a first-class bedroom, and that the early sunshine, though it might stream through their windows and wake them at 5 A.M., was, upon the whole, an advantage recognized by the aristocracy and recommended by the most fashionable physicians; while, as the niece by marriage of the representative of one of the largest commercial constituencies in England, she was able to inform Miss Fandango that the finest crystallized sugar, though fair to see, but too often sacrificed its saccharine qualities to mere appearance. These were the only boarders that at present ventured to complain. Mrs. Tiffin, the Indian widow on the second floor, took what was given her without a murmur, though she inadvertently gave offence on one occasion, when a brown compound was handed to her at dinner, of which she innocently observed, "This is very nice, but I do wonder, Mrs. Tidman, that you never go in for curries." To which the lady of the house rejoined, in an icy tone, "I do not know what you mean, my dear madam, by 'going in,' because it is a phrase that is not used in the best circles; but our cook is thought to have some talent for the dish you mention and of which you have just partaken."

The unfortunate Mrs. Tiffin had placed herself in the inextricable position of having eaten curry without knowing it.

These four were at present the only guests in the Tidman household, to which Mary Marvon was therefore welcomed all the more gladly, albeit the recommendation of Mr. Rennie would have insured her a prompt reception in any case. A clean and airy room was allotted her on the third floor, commanding a view of at least one thousand chimney-pots and the towers of a jail. Instead of the glass wardrobe of her Park Lane bower there was a chest of drawers, with two hang-nails, and a little mirror which, perhaps from motives of modesty, declined, except

upon compulsion, to be looked at, and always swung with its face to the wall. The floor was bare save in the centre, where a strip of carpet, such as is used by street acrobats, left a free opportunity for parquetry round its margin.

There was but one chair, but even "the highest in the land," as Mrs. Tidman (meaning, I suppose, "the broadest") pointed out and corroborated by her personal testimony, could only sit on one chair at a time; and, though there was no table, there was a capital mantel-piece, where one could put anything one pleased within certain limits as to weight and area. What pleased Mary most, however, was the fact that there was plenty of room for the type-writing machine which Mr. Rennie had undertaken to procure for her on favorable terms, and by which she intended to earn her livelihood. It was a very humble ambition, but, like all aspirations after honest work, a very self-sustaining one. It did not, indeed, enable her to forget, but to ignore, her misfortunes. It even caused her to reflect that the dream in which she had suffered herself to indulge with respect to Edgar Dornay had been not only baseless but unreasonable, and that, though he had not behaved well to her, the punishment which had been inflicted on her was not undeserved. In the desire which now consumed her, to make a few shillings a day by manual labor, she recognized the absurdity of her late pretensions, and beheld the width of the gulf between her and him. It had been very unlike her to have ever lost sight of it; not that she herself attached importance to social distinctions, but because she so well understood their value in the eyes of others. For the future she would bear in mind that her private views on that matter were exceptional, and did not one whit alter her own position as respected the rest of the world. On the other hand, they did give her some advantage. Not even misfortune can make us philosophic at one-and-twenty, but she was enabled to regard matters objectively and from without. Instead of being depressed by the social atmosphere in which she now found herself, she was roused by it.

Mrs. Tidman's reminiscences of the great, the magnificence of the elder Miss Blithers, and the airs and graces of Miss Fandango, amused her exceedingly. To some

girls in her position their patronage—for they all patronized her—would have been intolerable; Mary Marvon, however, was far from resenting it; she understood that it was a form of kindness—unfortunately, the only one that occurred to them—and it tickled her sense of humor. Human nature is the same play, whether performed in some barn in the provinces or at Her Majesty's Theatre, and life at Tidman's boarding-house, except for the accessories, was, she soon grew to understand, only Park Lane over again. Unhappily, it is not until we reach middle life—and sometimes, alas! not even then—that we thoroughly appreciate this fact. We are always fancying that on this or that landing of the great social stairs matters must be different, and that the higher we get the nearer we approach to heaven.

What poor Mary felt most acutely was, strange to say, the same pain that Beryl Paton, her antipodes in the matter of wealth and station, was suffering from—the sense of isolation. One must be a humorist, indeed, to enjoy to the full the weaknesses of one's fellow-creatures without a soul to share our harmless pleasures; for the cynic it is easy enough, but poor Mary was no cynic. When she ceased to take an interest in what was passing around her, and permitted herself to think, she was very unhappy. She had not been accustomed to the joys of home. The love of father and mother, of sister and brother, had been denied her, but she had hitherto not been without friends. At school she had formed several attachments to girls of her own age, which, though they are scoffingly spoken of as "eternal," at least last their time and fulfil their office. A girl without a girl friend is not to be envied; a boy stands upon a different footing, for there are some boys, and those of a fine type, who postpone their friendships till a later date, or, what is more common, attach themselves to their seniors on comparatively equal terms; whereas, between a young girl and a grown woman there may be affection, admiration, respect, or what you will, but never friendship.

Upon leaving school Mary had felt the pangs of separation from more than one loving heart, but the way to her affections was easy, and Mrs. Beckett soon found it;

and, though she could not supply the place of the companions of her own age, had mitigated their loss. Now she had lost both them and her, while even her kind protectress, Mrs. Sotheran, had somehow ceased to occupy the position she had once held in her regard. She was grateful to her for the personal tenderness she had always exhibited, but she no longer stood to her in the place of a mother; she was only the almoner of those from whose hands, had the alternative been offered to her, she would have accepted nothing. Perhaps also a false shame tended to increase this feeling of separation from the only person who, to her knowledge, possessed the secret of her birth. On the whole, Mary's sense of loneliness was very keen, and it was certainly not mitigated by being in the populous waste of London.

It was impossible, under such circumstances, being young and very human, but that she should take an interest in what of life lay nearest to her; such is the law of nature, save with misanthropes and monsters; if we are alone to-day, some tie, however slight—the interchange of a nod, a smile, a word of common courtesy—binds us to some fellow-creature to-morrow. The object of attraction in this case was Mr. Tidman—a little, gray man, as weird to look at as the hero of a German legend, but as alert and active as a German waiter. Its cause was his capacity for work, which in her present condition of mind was a somewhat exaggerated virtue in Mary's eyes, if not the very highest good. In the Tidman household the order of things, as it generally exists in such establishments, where the mistress is the bread-winner and the master the pipe-smoker, was reversed. Mrs. Tidman was a mere drawing-room ornament of the establishment, frail, though chaste; her husband, Atlas-like, supported the whole of it upon his shoulders, but with such ease and dexterity that he seemed rather to balance it upon his head, his nose, his chin. There was no domestic duty too trivial or too menial for him to undertake. He did not, indeed, make the beds, though, as the elder Miss Blithers observed, after a snubbing administered to her by the lady of the house, he had made his own bed and had to lie on it; but he did not disdain to light the fires when negligence or inatten-

tion had caused their extinction. He did all the catering for the house, and "saw to" things which eye of mortal man had never "seen to" before. He superintended the arrangements for the laundress, and knew the times and seasons when the lace curtains should be substituted for the chintz. He laid the dinner-table, when Jane and Ann were behind their time, with a celerity that would have taken the breath away from Mrs. Beckett's butler even to look at it, emphasizing each knife and fork, as he laid them down, as though he were selling the good-will of the establishment by auction at every blow. And whatever he did was accompanied by ceaseless talk, delivered at the top of his voice, whether his audience was up three pairs of stairs or at his elbow.

So much vigor and energy it would have been difficult to find in one individual, and they were accompanied by a humility that was unexampled. "I am nothing, I ain't," he would assure the astonished Mary when she complimented him on these Briarean performances; "and when I think of Matilda Jane" (his wife) "I feel something wuss than nothing." He clipped his words terribly, not so much from vulgarity (though he had probably never had more than a bowing acquaintance with Lindley Murray) as from extreme volubility. "She was a born lady, as you know"—(Mary did know. No one who had been under that roof for twenty-four hours—nay, for twenty-four minutes—could have failed to have heard of it)—"but she married a pauper. She was a Blenkinhouse, own niece to the late Sir Anthony Blenkinhouse, of the Manor, Slopton, and cousin to the present Sir Geoffrey. As sure as Christmas comes she is asked every year to the Manor, and received as one of the family. Of course they don't ask *me*; that would be a pretty thing indeed! Why, none of them does a stroke of work—haven't for centuries—wasn't born to it, you know—and breakfast not on the table till ten o'clock. Then, by the mother's side, Matilda Jane is connected with the Beckbirds. John Beckbird, the member for Lattenborough, is her cousin only twice removed. When they come up to town they always send their carriage for her once every season, to drive her round and round in the Park. It would be enough to turn some

people's heads for them, but not Matilda Jane; she's a paragon, she is." And then the excellent fellow would set to work upon whatever employment he was engaged in with redoubled energy, as though the recollection of his wife's relations had given him new strength.

For persons of great natural stateliness, like Miss Blithers the elder, or who stood on their dignity, like Miss Fandango, Mr. Tidman was too quick in his movements. He would rush round the dinner-table and anticipate their wants with the pepper-caster or the mustard-pot in a manner which would have been flattering, if it had not been so precipitate. He was dexterous—that is to say, he never upset the articles, but he banged them down with a noise and sharpness that suggested the explosion of a percussion-cap. The maids handed the dishes, but if his vigilant eye perceived a guest wanted anything he would shriek out the name of it interrogatively, "Bread?" "Beer?" "Potatoes?" as in some energetic juvenile game, and supply the demand upon the instant, before it could be indicated by utterance. It was his excusable boast, though expressed in somewhat vulgar language, that when anything was wanted he was "all there;" and, indeed, he reminded Mary of the poet's Abra, who would come not only without bell-ringing but "ere you called her name; and if you called, another Abra came," which happened, indeed, with Mr. Tidman very often, when Jane and Ann were not in the way.

Perhaps his greatest performance in point of despatch was the saying grace, which he never failed to do before the two chief meals of the day; such had been the custom, as his wife assured him, at the Manor, Slopton; and it was only respectful, as he most readily admitted, to the memory of Sir Anthony (who had left her ten pounds to buy a mourning-ring with) to keep it up. Only Sir Anthony probably had taken very much longer about his grace. The spirit and not the letter is, fortunately, what is of importance in such cases, but no one of Tidman's lodgers had ever yet heard what he said on these occasions. This was not, however, because attention was not called to it. Mr. Tidman commanded it by a violent drumming on the table with the handle of his knife and fork, murmured some

rapid and inarticulate words, and without a moment's pause pointed the blade of the carving-knife to his right-hand neighbor with the inquiry, "Beef?" It was like that dreadful "drawing-room game" where somebody throws a handkerchief in your face and cries out "Fire!" Sometimes there was an alternative, such as "Beef or mutton?" and the guests had to decide in such a hurry that there was no time except for regret. Mr. Tidman completed the whole round of the table, keeping count as he went, "One, two, three," etc., and filled every one's plate without the least attention to a genteel request for a small piece. Then he threw every one two roast potatoes, directed to their plates with great precision, and rushed round the table begging every one, with pathetic impotency, to eat "greens." "What! not so much? Couldn't think of such a thing, Miss Blithers. You must. They're beautiful greens. They always take greens at the Manor, Slopton, do they not, Mrs. Tidman?"

Thus appealed to, the languid and aristocratic Mrs. Tidman, startled from a genteel repose, would somewhat inconsequently remark that at the Manor, Slopton, there was a beautiful green-house, with more cucumbers in it than the family could eat, and that Sir Anthony had been wont to keep three gardeners, at the remembrance of which hereditary magnificence she would utter a gentle sigh.

"My wife was like one of those exotics herself," Mr. Tidman would break in, explanatorily, like a Greek chorus, "reared, as you may say, in the lap of luxury. I transplanted her to a very different soil; yet here she is, you see, as ornamental as ever." To mark Mrs. Tidman, as she folded her white hands and shook her head deprecatingly at this compliment, was to behold a picture of humility—though of the cottage-with-the-double-coach-house order—in a style of very high art indeed. Her husband's humility was of another sort; he had red hands, and was not unfrequently in a perspiration, so that he did not lend himself to pictorial illustration; but what there was of him was genuine. His hospitality, indeed, so rare in a boarding-house keeper, was almost that of the savage in its impotency. "Can't eat any more, miss?" he would expostulate with Mary, who, to say the truth, had very little

appetite in those days. "Oh, you must. I sha'n't take No. I want to fatten you."

He spoke like an ogre, but he meant nothing but good to her, and good to all about him.

It is generally supposed that being "knocked about" in the world—not "knocking about," for that is quite another thing, which you do in your steam yacht or in your own carriage, with a courier—"knocks the nonsense" out of you. Perhaps it may do so, but I have noticed that a good many other things, such as gentleness, and generosity, and all consideration for other people, are also often eliminated in the process; whereas Mr. Tidman, who had been most grievously knocked about (in the bankruptcy and county courts, among other places), had contrived to retain those attributes and, what was still more astounding, his native simplicity. He was not very clever in keeping out of scrapes, it must be confessed, nor was London the best place for the development of his energies. He never complained; but his ardent desire (which there was no hope of being gratified) was for the country and fresh air.

His physical activity was superhuman. If his superfluous force could have been stored it would have been a treasure to science, and might have instituted perpetual motion in itself, without any further waste of time as to the discovery of it. What became of it Huxley only knows. It was some satisfaction to be assured by science that it could not be lost. But within the limits of his private hotel Tidman spent his powers in vain, or to little purpose, like some gigantic squirrel making ten thousand revolutions per minute in a canary cage.

In this personage, as we have said, Mary took a great deal of interest. If the plain truth was to be told, I think we should find that not only the philosophers who "thread the labyrinth of the mind, and read the secret of the star," but those who "observe" the toad (without a thought of the precious jewel in his head, but simply for information), or who "cultivate" the bee (sometimes in their bonnets), are not very liable to social temptations; they have either discovered the deceitfulness of love and the vanity of pleasure, or have no natural taste for them; and Mary perhaps "observed" Mr. Tidman (though not under the

microscope, for he was extremely obvious to the naked eye) because she had little else to do. She shrank from her own thoughts, and welcomed any distraction from them, whereas the society of her fellow-lodgers, and especially that of the mistress of the house, compelled them into the old channel.

Mrs. Tidman was importunate to be informed how matters had been conducted in Park Lane, and would point out, with pathetic earnestness, how similarly the wheel of life had revolved at the Manor, Slopton. At the same time she did not hesitate to hint that she herself had not been the fly on the wheel, as Mary had been, but its chief motive power.

"Poor Sir Anthony," she was wont to sigh, "did nothing without me, and it was a curious coincidence that he died within less than three years after my marriage with Theodore."

Then the other ladies would shake their heads at Mr. Tidman, who would observe, significantly, "Quite true, ladies," in corroboration of his wife's evidence, as though the guilt of blood in hastening the demise of a baronet of the United Kingdom had really been upon his soul. No doubt it had been hard upon Sir Anthony; for his niece was two-and-thirty years of age when she had eloped, and he must naturally have calculated upon keeping her with him for the rest of his life.

The cross-examination to which Mary was subjected as to what Miss Blithers called the "convenances" of fashionable life was, in its particularity and detail, not unworthy of a court of law. "I have been accustomed to pretty good society myself," that lady would modestly remark, "but there is one thing that puzzles me: in the very highest circles do they, or do they not, wear gloves at breakfast?"

"My sister, of course, means the ladies," put in Miss Julia. She never originated a remark, but was very good at corroborations and deductions when a subject was once started.

"I can only say that Mrs. Beckett didn't wear gloves at breakfast," said Mary, smiling.

"Now I call that very satisfactory and conclusive," said

Miss Blithers, nodding and looking around her as if she had been the humble means of establishing an important fact.

"Conclusive, so far as it goes," remarked Mrs. Tidman. "But we must remember, if Miss Marvon will permit me to say so, that Mrs. Beckett, though no doubt a lady of great wealth and position, did not belong to the titled aristocracy. Now at the Manor, Slopton, Lady Theresa Blenkinhouse, my uncle's second wife (she was the Earl of Stoppington's daughter), always wore gloves at breakfast."

"What! even in hot weather?" exclaimed Mrs. Tiffin, with simplicity.

"In all weathers," replied Mrs. Tidman, with dignity. "Good heavens! do you suppose that a person of Lady Theresa's rank suffered from chilblains?"

This was hard upon Mrs. Tiffin, who did suffer from them, and so severely that she went about the house from September till May in woollen gloves and list slippers; but upon questions of social rank and the tables of degree Mrs. Tidman was merciless. Mrs. Tiffin was dreadfully abashed. Miss Fandango, however, who suffered, though in secret, from the same complaint as Mrs. Tiffin, perhaps from having been accustomed, like herself, to a tropical climate, was stung into antagonism. "After all," she said, "the aristocracy of England, whether titled or untitled, have no such conception of what it is to be a privileged class as have our great families in the West Indies. I am speaking, indeed, somewhat of the past and olden times."

Mrs. Tidman uttered an ejaculation which cannot be here set down; not, of course, that it was improper, but because it was inarticulate. It had, however, a significance of contempt equal to a folio. "I say, in the old times," repeated Miss Fandango, with a glow of indignation upon her dusky cheek, but in faltering tones; for, though naturally intrepid, she quailed before Mrs. Tidman. Like the savage, with bow and spear or the faithful and returning boomerang, she had at first done battle with her more civilized enemy with a light heart; but, having experienced the effect of the other's weapons of precision, she now feared the contest.

"I repeat," continued Miss Fandango, "that the fine spirit of feudalism was kept up in my native land to an extent undreamed of in England. My grandfather had five hundred slaves, male and female—not in livery, it is true, far from it—but all devoted to his sovereign will."

"Disgraceful!" murmured Miss Blithers.

"You may say that," corroborated Mrs. Tiffin, directing to her hostess a frowning and significant smile that promised a whole budget of colonial information as the price of pardon.

"If I am snapped up in this manner and not permitted to go on," protested Miss Fandango, "argument is impossible."

"No one wishes to stop discussion," observed Mrs. Tidman, majestically, "but I cannot at *my* table permit any indecorous allusions."

"Gracious goodness!" ejaculated poor Miss Fandango, "what do you mean?"

"I think we had better drop the subject," said Mrs. Tidman, severely. "Theodore, what was I saying about Sir Anthony?"

It was one of Mr. Tidman's multifarious duties to act as a remembrancer in ordinary to his wife, and to recall to her recollection, which was weak, what she had last said; but on the present occasion he had seized the opportunity of discussion among the ladies to bury himself in pudding. He had few chances of undisturbed enjoyment with his knife and fork (for I regret to say he was using both), but, when they came, he took advantage of them. He was dimly aware that West Indian slavery was the subject of discussion, but guiltily conscious of inattention.

"Theodore, what was I talking about?" repeated his spouse, in more decided tones.

Mary noticed his embarrassment, and whispered, good-naturedly, "Gloves."

"Why, let me see," returned Mr. Tidman, with an effort of memory, "the last thing you said, my dear, was that Sir Anthony's slaves in the West India Islands—or words to that effect—always wore gloves at breakfast!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A SYMPATHIZER.

ON the second day after Mary's arrival at "Tidman's" came the type-writer, which, amid these unsympathetic surroundings, was a relief to her indeed. I have heard a young lady describe the delight with which, from one of those excellent persons who live for others, a rich bachelor uncle, she received her first piano. A box of good things to the school-boy, when half the term was gone and all his pocket-money, was as nothing, she assured me, compared with that box of harmony. But even out of a piano, unless you perform on it in a very superior manner, you cannot get your living. Now, to Mary's eyes the great charm of her new acquisition was that, like Pandora's box, there was hope in it, and possibly independence. It is probable that the great majority of my readers are unacquainted with this ingenious invention, which is the more to be regretted since I cannot explain it to them. Machinery of all kinds is unintelligible to me, and the endeavor to understand it always results in vertigo. When it revolves, my brain begins to do the same, and that is the only point we have in sympathy. The instrument, however, is a circular affair with type at the end of wires, which start up like the hammers of a piano and print things a great deal more distinctly than some people write. There is a keyboard, and keys, which are letters, which require a sharp tap with the fingers. These are arranged in detachments for the right and left hand, but not—and this is the *crux*—in their alphabetical order. They are divided as equally as possible in relation to their probable use, so that each hand, or, rather, finger of each hand, may have the same amount of work to do. A proficient can play it like the piano, only with twice the rapidity; for my part (but then I am not clever, and have had but five years' practice), I pick out the keys laboriously with one digit, and

generally wrong. There is no royal road to the type-writer, nor to some people any road at all; but for women whose touch is delicate, and sight keen, the task comes easy. In the first quarter of an hour Mary contrived to print her own name, **MARY MARVON**, pretty correctly, and before the afternoon was over could turn out a sentence of ten words in as many minutes. This she accomplished with both hands; if she had used one (as instinct prompted her to do) she would have got on twice as quickly, and would have remained an ignoramus at it for life.

It was marvellous what pleasure—if pleasure is relief from pain—this close mechanical toil afforded her, for, being such a novice, while she worked at it she could think of nothing else. What a divine Nepenthe is work and hope! Gin and beer, though a much more popular mixture, is nothing to it; while, though the brandy recommended by the philosopher for heroes may be more excellent for *them*, for others its effect is deleterious. As these obstinate letters grew tame under Mary's touch, they began to spell for her, if not "comfort," at least "oblivion." She forgot the stigma of her birth, which whenever she thought of it pained her in the cruelest manner, for though she was proud, poor girl, she was not "too proud to care from whence she came." She forgot her lost love and his treachery—or, rather, his weakness, for her generous nature accused him of nothing worse. She forgot her disagreement with Mrs. Beckett, the only friend of her own sex she had in London. Nay, more than all (for this is the very crown of honest toil), when she had done her work, she felt stronger to fight and fitter to endure whatever harsh Fate might have in store for her; nor was even that faculty for the enjoyment of pleasure which work especially bestows denied her, though she looked forward to no opportunity for its exercise. Late in the afternoon a visitor called upon her, and was shown into the room set apart for such private interviews, and admirably adapted for its purpose. There was no external object in it which by grace or beauty was likely to distract the mind, save one solitary picture, limned by a departed lodger (and left, it was whispered, in part payment of

her account) of the Tidman establishment itself. Genius had glorified it, though it had failed in making it quite perpendicular. It was represented as a palatial structure, with a carriage-and-four driving up to the door, and two ladies driving away from it in a barouche; that they meant to return again was subtly indicated by the artist, from the fact of their being without luggage.

From a first glance at the apartment one would have said, "This is devoted to hair-cutting;" but by an ingenious and inexpensive device originality was preserved. There was no mirror, and in place of the florid paper that generally embellishes the bower of the *coiffeur* the walls were (or had been) of pure white.

Mary's visitor, on finding himself alone, looked round him with an intense expression of wonder and disgust, and, moved by some association of ideas, exclaimed, "By Gad! remanded."

Mr. Charles Sotheran had once had occasion to visit some one "in trouble" in a certain government establishment, whom he had found in an apartment exactly similar. In that case there had been nothing surprising in it; but to think that the house that had its room of state thus bare and wretched, with ground-glass for windows and oilcloth for carpet, should be the dwelling of Mary Marvon, fresh from the splendors of Park Lane, was amazing to him. The next moment, however, the gloom of the apartment was dispelled by the entrance of a sunbeam.

"Oh, Charley, how kind this is of you!"

Considering their mutual position, and the necessity for keeping him at arm's-length for his own sake, perhaps she should not have welcomed him so effusively; but for days Mary Marvon had seen no friendly face, and Charley's was such a bright one!

"Kind of me!" he echoed, holding out an eager hand, "kind of me! If you only knew what pleasure it gives me!"

"Does it, indeed?" she smiled, already conscious of her indiscretion; "then you must be easily pleased, Charley. This is not exactly a pleasure-house—at all events, of the Kubla Khan description—is it?"

"I don't care the least about the house," returned the young man, significantly.

“Now that I call rude, Charley; for though *I* may speak disrespectfully of Tidman’s, it is not for *you* to do so; it will probably be my place of residence for some time to come.”

“I am very sorry to hear it,” observed Charley, gloomily. “What are those papers under your arm? They look like law documents.”

“They *are* law documents, sir,” replied Mary, with dignity.

“They are not title-deeds of the establishment? You are not thinking of buying it, I do hope?”

“You are a very impertinent young man. They are pleadings.”

“Good heavens! Portia?”

“Yes; I have adopted that line of business.”

“Happy Antonio!” murmured Charley; “still more happy Bassanio!”

“I do not, however, go into court. Mr. Rennie has sent me the papers—no, not for my opinion, sir, though I don’t see why you should smile at *that*, but to be copied out. I thought you would like to see how I was getting on in my new profession. What do you think of that as a specimen of handwriting?”

“But it’s print,” exclaimed Charley; “at least, a sort of print.”

“Thank you, sir,” she replied, with a sweeping courtesy; “it is, as you say, though with no exaggeration of admiration, a sort of print. I printed it with my type-writer.”

“Shade of Spottiswoode! But what did you do it for?”

“That is a question, sir, between me and my employer; but if you must know, for sixpence a folio. At my rate of speed the first day, I calculated I might make a shilling a week by it; at that of yesterday, five shillings. I believe, with a little practice, and without working what we call in the trade ‘over-time’—besides having my ‘Sundays out’ (another technical term)—I shall be able to earn quite a large income.”

Charley’s face was very sad and pitiful as he replied, in a tone that was in marked contrast with her own studiously gay and playful one, “This is very strange news, Mary. Can I see this wonderful piece of mechanism?”

"No, sir, you cannot. The fact is, that Tidman's, though admirably adapted for social life and intercourse, is on the American system, so far as private sitting-rooms are concerned."

"Good heavens! Then do you actually work in your own room, Mary, hour after hour, at this what-you-may-call-it?"

"Type-writer, if you please."

"At this type-writer, for the wages of a seamstress?"

"Do I look like it, you silly boy?"

"With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,"

and so on. You are certainly not in a very complimentary humor."

Charley rose from his chair and began to pace the room.

"You don't know how it pains me, Mary, to hear of your working in this way."

"You mean of my working at all," she answered, smiling, though far from untouched by his artless pity; "that is because you are in government employment. Now, for my part, I like work."

"Some people do, I know," admitted the young man. "Browne in our office—'Browne with the e,' as we used to call him, to distinguish him from squinting Brown, 'Brown with the eye'—was very fond of work; he is now in a lunatic asylum. Mr. Beryl Paton—a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, you know—took a great interest in him in his retirement. By-the-bye, Mrs. Paton was inquiring after you only yesterday, Mary."

"After me? I did not know she had ever heard of me."

"Nor I. She did, however, make very particular inquiries. She had been to call in Park Lane, and I suppose Mrs. Beckett had told her about you."

"Perhaps," said Mary, stiffly.

"I know it's not a pleasant subject," said Charley, gently; "but I wanted to say a few words to you about Mrs. Beckett. It won't annoy you, will it, Mary?"

The frequency with which he employed her Christian name was rather marked; he felt a pleasure, so subtle

that he was hardly conscious of it, both in the utterance of the word by his own lips and in the hearing of it.

"No," she answered, "it will not annoy me," then added, with feminine inconsistency, "since I suppose you have some reason for it?"

"Yes, I have. I know—everybody knows—that Mrs. Beckett has behaved badly to you, Mary."

"I never said so."

"Of course not; you never say anything severe of any one except to their faces."

Here he smiled in spite of himself, for he felt that in that sentence he was somewhat anticipating matters. The only person to whom he had ever known Mary distinctly antagonistic was Mr. Ralph Dornay. He had seen her "sit upon him," to use Charley's own expression, "rather heavily" more than once.

"I know nothing of the cause of quarrel between you and Mrs. Beckett," he went on, "except that you were in the right; but I now know this, that she was in a position at that time in which considerable allowance should be made for her. She must have been troubled in her mind as to a certain course of action which, moreover, she was quite aware would not meet with your approval. You don't know what has happened since you left Park Lane, I conclude?"

"No harm to Mrs. Beckett, I hope?" returned Mary, earnestly. "I wish her nothing but good."

"I am sure of that, and, what is more to the purpose, I think she is sure of it also. However, to my tale, as narrators say in books. Mrs. Beckett is contemplating a change in her position which, you will agree with me, is, to say the least of it, an injudicious one. She is going to marry Dornay."

Mary did not reply, nor could she have done so had reply been necessary; she leaned back in her chair, with lips and eyelids closed like one dead, but her heart was beating fast. To think that the man to whom she had given it a few days ago should have thus bartered himself to another for gold—though she was aware that he had had the intention of doing so—was a terrible blow.

"I knew it would shock you," continued Charley,

gently. "Your opinion of Ralph Dornay coincides, I know, with mine. The man is little better than an adventurer."

"That is rather a strong term," said Mary, gently. It is remarkable how good news—personal satisfaction, indeed, of all kinds—inclines us to be charitable. As regarded herself, Mary had given up all thoughts of Edgar Dornay; he was as one dead to her, though, alas! not forgotten; yet the knowledge that he was not to become Mrs. Beckett's husband—that it was Uncle Ralph and not Nephew Edgar who had been chosen—was an intense relief to her.

It is in this that men and women, save in a few exceptional cases, are so different. "If she be not fair for me, what care I how fair she be? or, for that matter, what the deuce becomes of her?" is the man's thought. The woman's thought is different. It is one thing to be deserted, and quite another to feel that the deserter has enlisted elsewhere. That he has been seduced from his allegiance by the bounty-money given by the enemy is small comfort.

"I confess that I have not a high opinion of Mr. Ralph Dornay," Mary went on; "people, however, are the best judges of their own affairs."

"I don't think women are," said Charley, boldly.

"A person of your years and experience, of course, ought to know," said Mary, dryly. She had quite recovered herself by this time, and was prepared to defend herself as well as other people.

"Mrs. Beckett, at all events, may urge that plea," said Charley, smiling.

Mary had baffled him, but he was not the least put out. He had always good-nature—a powerful ally in contests with the Amazons—upon his side. "Still, I am afraid she has made a mistake, and even that she already knows it."

"Indeed!" In her heart, Mary thought that last statement of Charley's very possible. The whole matter was now plain to her: having failed with Edgar, Mrs. Beckett had accepted his uncle in pique and haste.

"If such is the case, Mary, Mrs. Beckett is surely to be pitied. Your own advice to me was to remember her for-

mer kindnesses, and not to give way to the indignation I felt against her. I followed it because it was your advice."

"I am glad to hear it, Charley; then you are still good friends, I hope?"

"Yes. And why should not you and she be still good friends? She was not herself when she said to you whatever she did say."

"If she was herself she certainly forgot it," replied Mary, icily.

Those infamous words, "Do you think I do not know you: your pretence of modesty, your mock humility, your innocence, forsooth, while all the time your heart—no, not your heart, your cunning, artful mind—was fixed on making him your husband?" once more rang in her ears. It is more difficult for a sensitive nature to forgive an insult than an injury.

"Oh, Mary, do not be hard against her," pleaded the young man. "I have not much knowledge of the world, as you just reminded me; but I know when a person is miserable, and very, very sorry for what they have done amiss. Mrs. Beckett said—and it was a great deal for her to say to one like me—'It is quite true that I have behaved harshly and unjustly to Mary Marvon.'"

"That must have been in reply to a reproach," said Mary, severely. "What right had you to reproach her?"

This was a difficult question. Charley had undoubtedly had a right to reproach Mrs. Beckett, since the widow had always encouraged his addresses to her young friend; but to Mary herself he could not advance that plea.

"I did not exactly reproach her," he answered, deprecatingly. "You told me, you know, to keep my temper; so I only said that she ought to be ashamed of herself, and that to have presumed upon her beastly money—no, I didn't say *that*," he put in precipitately—"I said to have thus presumed upon her wealth to insult a young girl in your position was what in a man would be termed the very basest description of cowardice. I was very careful, after what you told me," added Charley, humbly, "not to say anything offensive."

Mary bit her lip, perplexed between a smile and a

frown. She could hardly scold the young man for his championship, though it annoyed her exceedingly.

"Poor Mrs. Beckett was so sorry," pleaded Charley. "If it had not been for No. 3 that is to be I am sure she would have made some effort to get you back again. But with Ralph Dornay as master of the house, she felt you would never so much as look at it through the area railings. But she was so sorry. If she could make any kind of reparation, she said—Oh, pray don't look so like Medusa, Mary. She didn't put it like that; it's my awkwardness. Perhaps I was mistaken in what she meant."

"I hope so, indeed, Charley. I can hardly think that Mrs. Beckett offered me money, as though I had been a crossing-sweeper her carriage-wheels had run over in the street. I hope not that, indeed."

"Oh, dear, no," protested Charley, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief; "nothing was farther from her thoughts, I'm sure. She wished to be of use to you, that's all; only when I heard of your working at the what-d'ye-call-it for sixpence a sheet—"

"A folio, Charley. Again I must remind you that the type-writer is not a sewing-machine."

"Why, dear me, it's downright beggary!" exclaimed the young fellow, wringing his hands in deprecation.

"No, Charley, it would be beggary if I took Mrs. Beckett's money. At my new trade I shall earn quite enough for my modest needs."

"But these can't last forever," he urged, pointing to the lawyer's papers. "And when you get to be an expert—it's a mere question of political economy; I read all about it for my 'exam.'—the supply will exceed the demand."

"Then I shall go to the law stationers and into the public market armed with my little card, 'Documents copied with punctuality and despatch.' I have thought of all that, I do assure you."

"Well, if you really must, Mary—I mean, if you have made up your mind to occupy yourself in this way just at present, at least do not work for those starvation prices. Why not copy for authors instead of lawyers? I know a man who is always writing—poems and all sorts of things—and who gives five shillings a sheet—I mean a folio. He

is always complaining, since he himself writes so badly, that he can't get his work properly copied out. It won't be much, you know, but it's better than this sort of work."

"Charley! Charley! fie! for shame!" said Mary, reproachfully.

"What do you mean?" he inquired, simply, while an innocent blush overspread his youthful features.

"Only that I don't believe in poets who want their verses copied by the folio for five shillings, or any other price. Your political economy should have taught you better than to advocate 'bounties,' Charley. No, I am not angry with you"—for he had hung his head—"far from it, Charley. The deceit of some people is better than the plain-speaking of others. But there must be nothing of this sort from *anybody*. And now, Charley, I must go back to my work."

The young fellow's simple device for adding to her scanty gains had touched her, and she was not strong enough just now to endure even a mistaken kindness.

"I may come again?" he inquired, hoarsely. "My mother, perhaps, may send some message."

"Yes, yes, only not just at present. Good-bye, Charley."

"Good-bye, Mary."

He pressed her hand with a quick, passionate grasp which she did not return; but she felt the parting and the loneliness that was to follow; nay, when he had gone she even wept a little, for, as with poor Lucy in the ballad, though she had no thought of him as a lover, he

"had been kind till her,
And that was the thought brought the tear to her ee."

CHAPTER XXII.

A DEVOTEE OF LITERATURE.

WHEN we are lonely, or separated from our usual social circle, we are apt to respond to the friendly overtures of strangers more readily than under ordinary circumstances. We are not so fastidious in our choice of a

companion, and feel grateful for civilities which, when on our native heath and within call of our clan, we should decline with thanks, or even without them.

Throughout the day after Charley's departure poor Mary was very depressed and sad. It would have been a great comfort to her if she could have looked forward to other such visits, but for his own sake she had discouraged them. She had, as it were, with her own hand severed the only link between herself and her old world; and her new world, though she courageously strove to make the best of it, was by no means to her taste.

Of all the persons living under the same roof with her, perhaps Miss Julia Blithers seemed the least calculated to attract her sympathies; her opinions, as has been hinted, were but the echo of other people's, and they were always added, like an echo, when others had had their say. Her form was portly and majestic, which gave them some apparent weight, but morally she was but the shadow of her sister, of whom she stood in a fear that may have been wholesome, but was a little abject. The views of Miss Blithers the elder were dogmatic and severe; they were therefore Miss Julia's views; but the less mature lady had no more knowledge of the tenets with which she thus sympathized by proxy than Wamba, the son of Witless, had of ecclesiastical Latin. Her shibboleth, like his, would naturally have been *pax vobiscum*, but fate had ordered it otherwise. Mr. Tidman, in a moment of hilarity which he was made to regret, had dubbed the sisters parson and clerk; and what they most affected was the Commination Service. Those unregenerate and hopelessly ignorant heretics, Mrs. Tiffin and Miss Fandango, cowered before Miss Blithers's scourge (she was of the strictest sect of Bath Pharisees), and to every crack of it her younger sister murmured earnestly, "Amen." Under such circumstances, it was not likely that Mary Marvon would be much attracted towards Miss Julia Blithers; and when that lady suddenly developed an inscrutable attachment to her, her first impulse was to shrink from it, as one shrinks from the devotion of some very *retroussé*-nosed pug-dog who insists upon following us home.

In her peculiar position, however, the importunity of

friendliness from any one was hard to be resisted, and, almost without being aware of it, she found herself getting on a familiar footing with Miss Julia. It was something in her favor that her overtures were never made in public; she seized every opportunity—when they met upon the stairs or in the passage—to make the tenderest inquiries. Had Mary slept well, or had she found her pillow like a wafer? (In the Tidman establishment the pillows reminded one of the cognizance of the Prince of Wales—though of course he knew nothing about it—they had each three feathers in them.) Did she ever have a long candle? Bedroom candles were used at Tidman's, as in King Alfred's time, as a measure of time; they were designed, more or less accurately, for the period of each guest's disrobement. If anybody was accidentally longer than usual, through something having got in a knot, or other cause, she generally found herself in the dark.

"If you had a long candle," said Miss Julia, after several swallow-flights of talk, on an occasion when she found herself alone with Mary in the common sitting-room, "I suppose you would work at night, Miss Marvon?"

Mary flushed up indignantly. Poor people, and especially people who have not been used to be poor, always think that their poverty is being alluded to.

"I never work at night," she said. "If I wanted to do so, perhaps I could buy some inexpensive sort of candles—what is called in architecture 'composite'—for myself."

"Oh, dear, I didn't mean that," quavered Miss Julia.

Apart from her indomitable and autocratic sister she was very pusillanimous; she looked as frightened as Torquemada's secretary might have done had he fallen into the hands of a select circle of Jews.

"I only meant to say," she explained, "that when thoughts—great thoughts—come to me at night, it's so very sad not to be able to write them down. Sarah wouldn't hear of it, even supposing that I *had* a candle."

"I am not much troubled with great thoughts," said Mary, smiling in spite of herself. The picture of Miss Julia on her thin pillow, burdened with an inspiration which she feared would escape her memory before morning, tickled her fancy.

"But you do write, don't you?" inquired Miss Julia, eagerly.

"Yes, I write," said Mary. No one at Tidman's knew of her type-writer. She kept the instrument locked; and though every one in the house had secretly had a look at its case, Mary had not chosen to gratify their curiosity about it. What business was it of other people's that she made her living, or proposed to do so, by copying manuscripts? She was not ashamed of it, but she knew enough of the world to feel that the publication of the fact would not improve her position at Tidman's. The use of the article, therefore, remained a mystery. Some thought it a sewing-machine, others an harmonium; Miss Julia alone felt confident that it was a desk of peculiar construction, at which for five hours every day Mary composed works of the imagination.

"Is it prose or poetry?" whispered Miss Julia, tremulously.

"Prose."

An expression of disappointment flitted over the other's majestic features.

"But you *can* write poetry?"

"Just as well as prose," said Mary. This was audacious, though not altogether incorrect, for, of course, she was referring to the capabilities of the copying-machine and not to her own.

"Dear me! what a gift you must have! You must know, dear Miss Marvon, that you have a sister poetess in me; but I'm only a beginner. I've read and read and read poetry all my life. I dote upon it even when I don't quite understand it; but I've had such difficulties to contend with. Sarah thinks it wicked, so I've had to read it on the sly."

"But is not that wicked, Miss Julia?"

"Yes, but I don't at all mind that. Lord Byron was wicked — dreadfully wicked. Shelley was rather wicked. I should think, if one knew what he meant (though I never can quite make it out), that Shakespeare was wicked. It's a part of the poetic temperament."

"It's very easy to be a poet so far," said Mary, smiling.

The simplicity of her companion was so amazing, and

her ignorance so stupendous, that their combination with any such aspirations as she hinted at seemed incredible; yet Miss Julia's desire to distinguish herself in letters—that is, in print—was perfectly genuine, and the line she had selected for herself was poetry.

"I hope," continued Mary, as the other shook her head as though she had tried wickedness and found even that not so easy, "that it wasn't your conviction of my being wicked that led you to imagine that I wrote verses?"

"Not at all, my dear Miss Marvon. When Sarah has said that she was certain you had not been sent away from Park Lane for nothing, I could never bring myself to say, as she expected me to do, 'Of course not;' and when Mrs. Tiffin spoke of that young man coming to see you the other day—"

"I don't wish to hear what Mrs. Tiffin or any one else said about me," interrupted Mary, scornfully.

"I can easily believe it. What does the poet care for the opinion of the world? As for Mrs. Tiffin, as Sarah says, she is a dancing-girl without her attractions, a broken-down Eastern voluptuary on half-pay. My sister's words are always well chosen, though she doesn't always know what she is talking about. Oh, no, it was not your wickedness, my dear Miss Marvon, that made me recognize in you a sister bard. It was your conversation."

"Literature—much more, poetry—is not a common topic in this house, Miss Julia; I don't remember—"

"Of course not," broke in the other; "it is so natural to you to speak of these things—to drop pearls, as somebody says, out of the jewel-case of your memory—that you don't know when you're at it. I don't talk much, as you may have noticed, but I observe; I store up, I study the great book of human nature, because some day I mean to write about it myself. Yes, some day, when Sarah's dead and I have got the money to bring it out, I mean to publish my poems."

"Gracious goodness!" ejaculated Mary.

"Of course it surprises you to hear that I contemplate anything of the sort," said Miss Julia, humbly; "I know everybody thinks me a worm—a mere earth-worm."

"Indeed it was not *that*," said Mary, apologetically,

“but you seemed to look forward so—or at all events to regard so philosophically the prospect of the decease of your sister.”

“I hate her!” was the surprising rejoinder. “There, it’s out—I *hate* her! The poet (as you are aware) is dowered with the hate of hates, the scorn of scorns, but no poet ever hated his sister as I do.”

It was impossible, hearing the tone in which she spoke, to disbelieve her. The worm, as she called herself, had shown its characteristic capacity for turning in a most unmistakable manner. Miss Julia Blithers had for once indulged herself in an impulse, and in the presence of a kindred spirit (as she fancied her present companion to be) had laid bare her soul. “My dear Miss Marvon, you see before you a crushed flower.” Stem and blossom, she stood five feet ten, and would have weighed the scale down against an aloe-tree, tub and all. “But for that woman my name would have been inscribed in the rolls of fame; but for her it would have been written there that *circa*—that’s the word, though I don’t exactly know what it means—that *circa* 1870 Julia Blithers ‘*flourished*.’ As it is, I am far from flourishing, but I can recognize genius in another.”

“But indeed, Miss Julia, I am no genius,” remonstrated Mary, laughing; “you are altogether mistaken about me.”

“You might just as well say I am mistaken about myself. I have genius too, but not to so great an extent. If you were not a very great genius, how could you stand up against Sarah? She has given up patronizing you; have you noticed that?”

“I have,” said Mary, “and with considerable satisfaction.”

“Just so; but it’s not because she likes you. She hates you—that’s nothing; she hates everybody but herself—but she is also exceedingly afraid of you. Do you remember how you set her down about Jupiter and Io?”

“I remember that I set her right,” said Mary.

“That *is* setting her *down*,” returned Miss Julia. “In the Gallery catalogue the letters were both printed the same size, so she took them for a one and a nought, and called it Jupiter and Ten. She had called it so to me before, but I had not the courage to correct her. I envy

you many things, Miss Marvon, but, above all, I envy you your courage and independence. Oh!"—here she threw up her hands with passionate energy—"if one only knew while there was yet time, before the mischief was done and one was made a slave for life, how foolish it is to endeavor to conciliate the cruel! What is the use of it? Do you think it pleases them? *Nothing* pleases them; it only makes them feel how much you are afraid of them, and encourages them to trample on you."

Tragedies are common enough among the commonplace; but here was a tragedy in surely the very last place where one would have looked for it. Unless Miss Julia Blithers was an actress of the Siddons order (which seemed improbable) she was speaking out of the fulness of a bruised heart and from the experience of a life of misery. "I know what you are thinking; I know what you are feeling; she went on. "You are saying to yourself, 'Even supposing what this woman says is true, how can it excuse her conduct to others? Why is she so bitter? why is she so brutal?' I will tell you why. She is a coward, because she wishes (though she knows it to be useless) to curry favor with her master. If you had been crushed as I have been, from your very cradle, you would have come to be a coward too."

It was terrible to hear her. Self-humiliation could hardly further go. Her tall form and huge proportions seemed to make her abasement more pitiable. So have I seen in school life, where the system permitted of it, some dullard of man's growth cowed and tormented by some pygmy prig, whose turn for Latin verses has given him ill-placed authority. But even a turn for Latin verses is something, whereas Miss Blithers the elder had no gift in that way, nor in any other.

"It is very, very sad!" sighed Mary, compassionately. Her natural impulse was to encourage her companion to revolt; but, unlike some sons of freedom with whom I am acquainted, principle was not everything with her. She had a tender consideration for the slave herself. "I conclude," she said, "that you are dependent upon your sister?"

Miss Julia bowed her head. "I have not one farthing in the world," she moaned, "save what she chooses to

give me. My father arranged it so because Sarah had always had the management of me. He would not listen to me; he said I was as ignorant of the world as a child; but even a child knows when she has been wronged. Oh, cruel! cruel!"

"But your mother?"

"Sarah killed her! Yes, I say Sarah killed her. She was a delicate, sweet creature, with gentle ways, and without a will of her own. She was superseded by my sister as the mistress of her own house. My father and she ignored her very existence, and between them they broke her heart. You have a tender heart, Miss Marvon, too; but then you have a will of your own. Great heavens! what would I give for a will of my own—though, indeed, what would be the use of it, since I should have no power to use it?"

Before Miss Julia had begun her confidences—that is to say, a quarter of an hour ago—it would have seemed impossible to Mary that she should have taken any interest in her. But throughout these revelations, spontaneous as a geyser that finds for the first time an outlet, and almost as vehement, Mary had been drawn towards her more and more. That account of her dead mother, and how she came by her end, went home to Mary's very heart, where it touched a sympathetic chord. Of her own mother she dared scarcely think; but something whispered to her, when she did so, that she too had been badly used; and had not she herself a father whose memory had nought of reverence in it?"

"I am very sorry for you, Miss Julia—very sorry."

"I know that," answered the other, rocking herself in her chair, to the great peril of its dismemberment—"I know that—the first person that ever has been sorry for me. You would help me if you could, I feel, but nobody *can* help me. It was selfish of me to tell you all this when I knew that—when I knew it could only make you miserable for nothing. But I did not mean to tell you when I began; let us talk no more of it. What were we saying before? Yes, it was about literature. Oh, what a blessing it is to read, and to forget our own lives in the thoughts of others!"

This was perhaps the most sensible observation that Miss Julia Blithers had ever uttered, and, so far as she was concerned, it was original. If dull people would but confine themselves to matters within their own experience and understanding they would be much better company. What is genuine is scarcely ever wearisome. The misfortune is that people conscious of intellectual incapacity are prone to borrow the thoughts of others without due appreciation of their meaning. It is fair to say of Miss Julia that, though she thus borrowed freely, it was never without acknowledgment; but, from a combination of various causes, the chief of which was misquotation, it happened that she often libelled the illustrious dead, and—to the unlearned who chanced to listen to her—made their illustriousness a subject of very natural surprise and amazement.

“Of course no one but yourself, my dear Miss Marvon,” she went on with sudden cheerfulness, “has any idea of my literary attainments. I could often set people right upon this and that, which would be a very great satisfaction to me, if I only had the courage; but then Sarah would be sure to say, ‘And, pray, how came *you* to know?’”

Mary nodded confirmation; she thought such an observation was very likely to be made.

“Now the other day,” Miss Julia continued, complainingly, “I might have distinguished myself at the dinner-table. You remember how poor Miss Fandango got laughed at for alluding to Jane as a ‘youth,’ upon the ground that youth was always masculine and never feminine, except, as Sarah said, with her usual bitterness, except perhaps in the West Indies.”

“I remember that delicate stroke of satire,” observed Mary, smiling.

“Just so. Well, poor Miss Fandango was quite right. It is poets who make the language, and one great English poet has certainly made ‘youth’ feminine. Coleridge, in his ‘Youth and Age,’ has done it. I haven’t the book, but I distinctly remember the words. Some old woman is bewailing the days gone by when she was a youth.”

“Are you sure it was a woman, not a man?” inquired Mary.

“Quite sure. It can’t be otherwise, because she says,

‘Life is but thought; so think I will
That youth and I are house-maids still.’

So you see that she and the other youth must both have been house-maids.”

“My dear Miss Julia,” said Mary, keeping her countenance with a great effort, “I think you are mistaken. The words are almost identical, so that your error is merely one of ear; but what Coleridge wrote is not ‘house-maids’ but ‘house-mates.’”

“But there is no such word in the dictionary.”

“Perhaps not; but then, as you have said, it is the poet who makes the language.”

“Dear me! I suppose you’re right. What a memory you must have for the least things! I’m very much obliged to you for the correction; not that it much signifies. I have cried over those lines again and again when I thought it was house-maids. Of course Coleridge knew best; but I must say that house-mates is not half so natural.—Dear me, here’s Sarah,” added Miss Julia, hastily. “If she asks any questions, pray remember we were talking about domestic servants.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN AUTOGRAPH COLLECTOR.

THE reposal of a confidence, especially when it is unsolicited, has the same effect as the conferring of an obligation; for the time, at least, it knits together both giver and receiver. It is probable that by no other means than those she had taken, though she had done so without premeditation or design, could Miss Julia Blithers have drawn Mary Marvon to herself. As it was, in her isolation and loneliness, Mary began to take no little interest in her new acquaintance. She sincerely pitied her fate, and sympathized with it. She had her own reasons, as we know, to complain of Fortune, but she acknowledged to herself that Miss Julia’s case was more deplorable than her own. The

superiority of her position was not, indeed, considerable, nor did it admit of affording the other any material assistance ; but what help she had to give, in the way of advice and comfort, she gave her ; and Miss Julia's gratitude can only be guessed by those who have awakened the interest of a fellow-creature for the first time.

What somewhat interfered with Mary's sympathy—and the harmony of our most generous emotions is often marred by these false notes—was the folly and affectation of its recipient. Miss Julia was a bibliomaniac, but one of a very anomalous kind. Bindings were nothing to her, and one edition was as good as another : she loved them for their authors' sakes. So far she stood upon a pinnacle ; where she came down from it (and a very considerable way) was, that she had only the faintest conception of their authors' meaning. One is not astonished at the admiration for blue china ; there is nothing in it ; those who admire it have nothing in *them*, and the whole affair is in harmony. Stamp-collectors are stamp-collectors ; they are in the same category with those who amass walking-sticks ; their fancy, such as it is, is explicable. But fancy was the very last thing in which Miss Julia permitted herself to indulge. She was the very antithesis of the poet who wrote of himself,

“ Not to admire is all the art I know.”

She was one long note of literary admiration.

Among her secret treasures—kept in a box under her bed, and guarded from Sister Sarah's eyes by the modest folds of a flannel petticoat—was an autograph-book in which the names of great living writers were inscribed. In some cases she had even got whole letters from them. One day she brought this to Mary Marvon's room, and opened it with as much impressiveness as though it had been the original MS. of “Hamlet.”

“If anything was to happen to this, my dear,” she said, with solemnity—“fire, thieves, or the moth—I really think it would kill me.”

It was really an interesting book, and contained communications, not only from persons of literary eminence, but from some who, Mary had heard, were very un-

willing, in general, to gratify curiosity such as Miss Julia's.

"And are these all really genuine?" inquired Mary, involuntarily; for it had crossed her mind that, like Mr. Toots, Miss Julia might possibly have passed her leisure time—of which she had plenty—in composing letters to herself from conspicuous people, and imitating their hand-writings.

"I thought you would be astonished!" returned her companion, triumphantly, and not in the least disturbed by what might certainly have seemed a somewhat injurious suggestion. "Genuine? Yes, every one of them."

"And all addressed to you?"

"Lor bless me! no, not one of them."

She turned to the other end of the book, where there was a fine collection of envelopes, with different directions: "Miss Graves, The Grange, Land's End;" "Mr. Winlass, ship-master, Newcastle," etc., etc. "These are the people—that is, their addresses—to whom they were written."

"But how on earth did you get possession of them?"

"Ha, ha! yes, yes!"

The cunning and exultation exhibited on Miss Julia's ordinarily stolid countenance were amazing to witness, and also a little alarming. It seemed just possible to poor Mary that her companion's mania might not be only for autographs, but might have a wider range.

"How did I get 'em? That's *my* secret, my dear Miss Marvon. If you'll show me that funny desk of yours"—and she pointed to the type-writer—"then I'll tell you how I got these letters."

The mixture of earnestness and simplicity in her manner was remarkable. Her desire for barter reminded one of that carly example of trading in our nursery annals—"If you will give me a bite of your apple I will show you my chilblain."

"It is not a desk, it is a printing-machine," said Mary, smiling; "and I will show it you (provided you promise not to speak of it to others), without fee, emolument, or reward."

Then she unlocked it, and, sitting down at the key-board,

dashed off pretty rapidly this specimen of typography: "How did you maneag" (meaning "manage") "to get those autographs?"

"Why, it's printed!" exclaimed Miss Julia, in an ecstasy. "Dear heart! if I could only get my poems done that way!"

The passionate sincerity of the aspiration was almost too much for Mary's gravity. At first she imagined that Miss Julia wished that her poetical effusions could be turned out mechanically, and thereby save her spiritual nature from the wear and tear of conception—prevent the sword from wearing out the scabbard. The next words of her companion fortunately undeceived her, and prevented her from committing herself to what might have proved an unpardonable error.

"You see, my great difficulty, dear Miss Marvon, has hitherto been the getting into print. Nobody does justice to their own productions when reading them aloud. 'The chariot-wheels,' as the poet tells us, 'jar and grate when we attempt to drive them forth.'"

"That is not quite the correct quotation," said Mary, gently. "The line, I think, runs thus: 'The chariot-wheels jar in the gate through which we drive them forth.'"

"Just so. What a memory you have! I thought it was 'jar and grate;' the idea is much the same, but it is better to have it quite correct. Well, I don't like to spoil my poems by reading them aloud, while my handwriting—at least, so say the few people to whom I have ever shown my MSS.—is very difficult to read. Now, if it could be printed off like this, there would be no excuse for them."

There was a moment of hesitation with Mary. She was disinclined to increase the sum of human misery by making Miss Julia's poems legible to her friends; on the other hand, Miss Julia's yearning look was almost irresistible.

"I have no objection to lend you my machine, and in time you will learn to print for yourself," said Mary.

"I learn? Never!" exclaimed Miss Julia, confidently. "I have never learned anything in my life. What I can do—such as poetry (and, indeed, that's the only thing I can do)—comes by nature. Oh, if I could but just see

two or three lines of my very own in print!" She clasped her hands ecstatically, and cast her eyes to the ceiling, as though she would have added, had she dared, "I could then die happy."

"Well, I have my own work to do, which takes up a great deal of time; but if it's only two or three lines—" said Mary, good-naturedly.

"Only two lines, just two, a couplet," interrupted Miss Julia, eagerly. "I thought of them last night just after I got into bed, and kept repeating them to myself, for fear I should forget them, till Sarah called out, snappishly, 'Don't mutter!' and drove them out of my head. It was just like what happened to poor Coleridge when the tax-gatherer called, you know, and spoiled his dream of Kubbledy Khan."

"Kubla Khan, was it not?" suggested Mary.

"Very likely. What a memory you have!

"'Could I revive within me
That sympathetic song!' etc.

Thank goodness, I can revive it! It all came again to me this morning. I had a dream of the sea. A tremendous storm was lashing it, as I have seen it do at Margate, when it wetted Sarah and me quite through on the jetty. 'The league-long boilers,' as Tennyson calls them, were breaking on the beach."

"'Rollers,' I think, is Tennyson's word," smiled Mary.

"Perhaps. What a memory you have! But they do boil as well as roll, so that don't matter. Then there came a calm, and the contrast was most impressive. I wrote more than fifty lines about it."

"But the couplet," said Mary, with her fingers on the key-board.

"Just so: I can't expect more than that, else it seems a pity to mutilate the poem. Yes, I think these lines are as good as any. 'The giant waves'—have you got that?—

"'And the giant waves, in their infant play.'

I think the anti-what-do-you-call-it, 'giant' and 'infant,' you know, rather striking."

"Is all that in the couplet?"

“No, no, I merely wished to point out the anti—”

“The antithesis.”

“Just so—what a memory! It’s the very last couplet of all, and gives a sort of dying farewell to the watery scene:

“And the giant waves, in their infant play,
Flashed like the flowerets of yesterday.”

Miss Julia was as obviously waiting for commendation as a dog sitting on his hind-legs is begging for a bone. But Mary could not give it: the most she could hope to do in the way of favorable criticism was to restrain her mirth.

“It looks very well in print, does it not?” inquired the poetess. “I had no idea it was so good when I wrote it out.”

“I am so glad you like it,” said Mary.

“Like it! I never was so delighted in my life. The ‘giant waves’—one seems to see them rolling in, or perhaps going out. Yes, they are going out. I really don’t see anything to laugh at, Miss Marvon,” she added, with severity. “There is surely nothing ludicrous in a picture of nature in repose after a fit of stormful passion.”

“It is not that, Miss Julia,” murmured Mary, with the tears running down her cheeks. “Pray forgive me—I was afraid I had spelled flowerets with two t’s.”

She had really no apprehension of that nature; but if ever a tarradiddle was excusable, this slight departure from the main line of truth must surely be held to be so, since it avoided what must otherwise have been a most disastrous collision.

“I was also thinking,” added Mary, “that you are very cleverly getting out of telling me how you got those autographs.”

“Oh, no, I have not forgotten my promise,” answered Miss Julia, at once forgetting her mortification in this evidence of her companion’s interest in her affairs, one thought expelling another in the narrow smooth-bore of her mind, like pellets in a pop-gun.

“Now, here’s ‘Miss Graves, Land’s End,’ for instance. Well, you wouldn’t think it, but that’s me.”

“But how can you be Miss Graves?”

"I assume the character: no one is hurt by it, because there is no such person: she is the offspring of my imagination. I select the Land's End for her residence as being an out-of-the-way place, and the least likely for any one to visit, and I will write in her name to some great philosopher or poet, thus:

"DEAR SIR,—I take up my pen at the instance of a gray-haired and widowed mother, who finds in your immortal works the best solace for the troubles of a lifetime; she has heard that you are about to honor the neighborhood by your presence—"

"But, my dear Miss Julia—"

"Just so; you are going to say that that was not true, but I am not so sure about that. Granting my premises—starting, that is, upon the supposition that I have a widowed and gray-haired mother—how can you lay it down that she has not heard that the philosopher in question is not coming into her neighborhood? The whole affair is in the regions of the imagination. Well, she writes (that is, *I* write): 'If you are coming, it is my dearest mother's most earnest wish that you should make our little house your home during your visit.' I add something about fresh eggs and the mild air of the Atlantic, to give the thing a local coloring, and the trap is laid. In nine cases out of ten it catches them."

"What! do you write to more than one?"

"Certainly; I send the hospitable invitation to half a dozen, like a circular. Some of them are rude, or perhaps suspect something, and they don't reply; but others do. Here is one: "Upon this earth-planet of ours hospitality (dearest to those under another's roof-tree) is perennial, an eternal verity," etc., etc. You know who that was."

"But how audacious!" exclaimed Mary, aghast at the other's complacent satisfaction at her success. "Suppose he had *come*?"

"My dear Miss Marvon, he couldn't. There was nowhere for him to come to except the post-office. Replies were forwarded to my address at Bath. Perhaps my prettiest touch was the epistle from the ship-master at New-

castle, Mr. Winlass. It was addressed to two great poets to whom I had written perhaps fifty times before without obtaining a syllable of reply. One of them, whom I had likened in one of my previous communications to a golden eagle, had written back to me through some secretary that if he was an eagle he was an old one, and not to be caught with chaff; he didn't even sign the letter. But Mr. Winlass, of Newcastle, caught them both with this bait :

“DEAR SIR,—I know little of books in a general way; I have had no time for studying them, my whole life having been passed upon the stormy deep, where for months I have had no volume in my hand save yours. My voyages were successful, and in time I became a ship-master, with a certain share in each venture. Unhappily, in my old age misfortunes have crowded upon me. My last chance is settled in a vessel about to be launched upon the Clyde. If I could obtain permission from you to call it by your name it would give me heart and hope. May I?”

Well, one wrote back, a little curtly (but still he signed it), ‘Yes, you may.’ The other— But you can read it for yourself.”

Mary turned to the page indicated by her companion. It was quite a long letter, a royal communication from the king of bards :

“DEAR SIR,—You are very welcome to what you ask of me. I hope that the good ship”—here followed his own name—“may have a more prosperous voyage than its godfather can boast of having met with on the sea of life. What you say of my works is very gratifying. But you use the word volume : my poems are in forty volumes. The edition I always recommend is that with my portrait, edited by Cutter. Get it. If it is your intention to furnish the vessel with a figure-head, my statue by Carver, R.A., or the little bust by Chisella (of Florence) in this year's Exhibition, will supply all that can be supplied by marble. I shall look into the shipping intelligence for the next few days with interest.”

“I think that very neat and characteristic,” observed Miss Julia, complacently, as she restored her precious book to its casket, the flannel petticoat. “They say he has not sent any one his autograph for twenty years. That’s Sarah’s knock at the door, I know, so I must say good-bye.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE FROM THE SHOULDER.

As time went on Mary, whose fingers were as apt as her observation was keen, became an adept at her new calling. She performed surprising feats with her type-writer. For one thing, she challenged Miss Julia to a trial of speed; the latter with pen and ink to copy a paragraph of a newspaper against her, wherein print beat writing as easily as paper beats papyrus. Miss Julia toiled after in vain, with this manifest disadvantage added, that, whereas what was printed at this high pressure was clear and without mistake, *her* manuscript was illegible. Mr. Rennie complimented Mary on her work the next day in a letter which enclosed the reward of her labors, and sent her a fresh batch of pleadings—grist for the mill.

To Miss Julia, who had almost perforce been made her confidante, Mary Marvon’s contentment with these small mercies seemed marvellous enough; but the truth is, the discovery that we are able to support ourselves, no matter how humbly, independent of outside assistance, is to the independent spirit a most solid grain of satisfaction. If we cannot do that (supposing there is need for us to do it), we are at the mercy of fortune, indeed, and all the philosophy in the world can no more comfort us under the deficiency than supply it. It was fortunate that Mary had this consolation, for she felt her isolated condition—to which she could scarcely make up her mind whether Miss Julia was a relief or not—more than ever. She never now beheld the face of a friend. Charley could not trust himself to come, or thought his visits might be misconstrued, or that Mary would resent his calling again so soon. Mr.

Rennie confined himself to epistolary communication, and Mrs. Sotheran did not even write. There was good reason enough for this, but Mary did not know it: she had the uncharity (born of bitterness) to imagine that her last letter had angered her old friend, and produced a breach between them. Truly has it been written that the destruction of the poor is their poverty; and when we feel forsaken and out of heart our behavior unwittingly tends to estrange us from the hand of friendship.

Still, in its pleasureless, mechanical way, the wheel of life was turning smoothly enough for Mary, when there suddenly came a "kink" in it. It was a small thing, but when we are in a small way, small things that go against us are catastrophes. In looking through one of her pleadings, which she was wont to do before starting with her machine, it struck Mary that she had copied it before. The sense of the matter was, of course, too wrapped up in repetitions and technicalities to be intelligible to her, but the names of the parties to the suit were the same, and she felt convinced it was the same suit. Mr. Rennie had told her that only one copy of the pleadings would be required. It was natural, therefore, to conclude that there was some mistake. But was there a mistake? was the question that disturbed poor Mary, and brought the hot blood into her cheeks. Her suspicions would not, perhaps, have been aroused but for Charley's well-meant but transparent device for supplying her with bogus material; but it now struck her that Mr. Rennie might have no more work for her at present—she had done a great deal for him in a very short time—but was sending her these pleadings, or some of them, out of mere charity, to keep her employed. It is one of the many disadvantages of a sensitive nature combined with a keen intelligence that it rarely experiences the bliss of ignorance; it cannot take good-fortune for granted, but must needs be inquisitive and solicitous as to whence it comes. It has a tendency to jump at once to the most unpleasant conclusions. Yes; Mr. Rennie, out of a mistaken kindness, was treating her as a child—nay, worse, was offering her a dole under pretence of wages!

One feels how insignificant such a mere detail must ap-

pear to many who read it—fine ladies who loll in their arm-chairs “and take up a book” during some bad quarter of an hour, ere the carriage comes to take them to the Park or the Opera. How unreasonable, too, it must needs seem to others, who receive Fortune’s favors without a scruple as to the deserving of them! But to poor Mary it brought the heart-ache. Her little dream of independence—no gorgeous vision at the best—vanished at once, and gave place to that terrible desire to know the worst which seizes on those who are but too often the least qualified to bear that knowledge. To write to Mr. Rennie on such a subject was, however, most painful to her. She resolved to go out at once and make inquiries as to the supply of materials for her calling, where a true love of independence (as she bitterly reflected) should have led her at first, namely, to the open market. She would apply to some law stationer for the employment she required, and put herself, if possible, out of reach of such unwelcome favors for the future.

It was getting late, tea had already been served in the common parlor; but such shops, she thought, would still be open, and she felt that she could never sleep with such an uncertainty on her mind. Placing a specimen of her work in her pocket, she rapidly put on her bonnet and mantle and descended the stairs, and, meeting no one on her way, let herself out at the front door. In her haste she had forgotten her veil, but the omission did not trouble her: there are some girls in such sad positions that they even forget that they have pretty faces, and also so innocent that they are unaware of the peril to which they expose them.

Since she had been at the boarding-house she had only been twice out-of-doors before, each time in company with Mrs. Tidman, and at her especial invitation. As a rule, it is only the light-hearted that seek the sunshine and fresh air—those who are out of heart, unlike the warrior of old, prefer rather to “hear the mouse squeak than the lark sing.” Not that there were larks of any kind to be found in the neighborhood of Tidman’s, even had Mary had a fancy for them. The streets for miles round were of the same pattern—dull, decorous, depressing, with here and

there a waste piece of ground which should have been garden. It was only suburban in its inconvenience—its distance from any genuine articles of food ; for any hint of the country it might have been in Cheapside. The calm of the summer evening made itself felt, however, even there. Mary felt its refreshing influence as she walked on. Her goal was but a couple of streets away, a shop she had noticed with "Bernard, law stationer," over the door, and she soon reached it. The proprietor, after the toils of the day, was enjoying a short pipe in the doorway, without his coat. He was a little man, with eyes and hair like a ferret, but without its keenness of expression; he had a dazed and subjugated look, as of a ferret who had been kept in a bag much too long. The appearance and attire of his visitor, which in more civilized regions would have passed unobserved, or have been pronounced faultless, seemed to impress him very much. As he stepped round behind his counter to attend to her wants he cast a wistful glance towards the back shop, as though he would have liked to call some one to come and have a look at her, but was at a loss for a pretext.

"I want some copying to do, if you please," said Mary, coming straight to the point. "This is a specimen of my work in that way."

"Dear me ! Ahem !" said the man, the cup of whose amazement seemed to have run over at this request. "Matilda !"

The glass-door at the back of the shop here opened, and a woman, tall for her sex, but, as compared to her husband, a giantess, came forward, with a child in her arms.

"The young lady wants some copying to do," observed the little man, deferentially.

"What sort of copying ?" observed the tall woman, regarding the applicant with great severity, and even suspicion.

"Pleadings," explained Mary ; "that is what they are called, I believe," she added, modestly. She addressed herself naturally to the male, as the person likely to be best informed upon the matter, but it was the lady who replied to her. "Pleadings ? Certainly not. We have nothing of that kind here."

The woman's manner was so disagreeable that Mary shrank from her. She was not afraid of her in the least; but perceiving that her intention, however inexplicable, was to be offensive, she ignored her.

"Perhaps," she continued, still addressing herself to the shopkeeper, "you could recommend me—"

She ought to have said "refer" me, but in her annoyance and agitation she used the first word that occurred to her—"to some other stationer."

"No," said the tall woman, with greater severity than ever; "we never give recommendations to parties when parties are unknown to us."

Mary turned on her heel and left the shop. It was her first experience of the relations between employers and employed from the latter's standpoint, and it did not impress her with the dignity of labor. Why should this dreadful woman have spoken to her in that insolent manner, while her husband, on the other hand, would not speak to her at all? Was it possible that there was anything unusual or disgraceful in applying for work as she had done? Full of humiliating thoughts, she was walking rapidly home, when she heard hurrying footsteps behind her. It was the little shopkeeper, still in his shirt-sleeves, but with a slip of paper in his hand instead of his pipe.

"The best establishment is that," he gasped, pressing the paper into her hand. "It will be open for the next two hours. Don't you mind my Matilda: she's an excellent creature, only she *will* believe that every young woman who enters the shop is coming after *me*."

Before Mary could reply he had vanished, the thought that his Matilda might be on his track no doubt lending him wings. His behavior was ridiculous enough, but it was clear to Mary that he had exposed himself to no slight peril for her sake; for who, to such a man, is a more formidable source of fear than such a wife?

The paper in her hand bore the address of a stationer in the Strand. The distance was considerable, and it was nearly seven o'clock. Prudence would have advised her going home; she had certainly had enough, and to spare, of adventure for that night. But poor Mary was not quite herself; her doubts about those pleadings were importu-

nate, and even her late rude experience tended to upset her usual sober judgment, and put her in an excited and abnormal state. She feared that a certain sinking of her heart, which had already begun to oppress her, would overwhelm her utterly if she went home and let it have way. As she hesitated, she was hailed by a passing omnibus bound for the Strand, and she got into it. There were few passengers, but to her fancy they took more notice of her than was pleasant. She had not been accustomed to that mode of conveyance, nor to the class who use it, and did not understand that folks can lean upon their sticks or suck the handles of their umbrellas, and stare at you like mesmerists, without in reality being aware of your existence. The journey, with its delays, seemed interminable; and long before she reached its termination—Charing Cross—she regretted having undertaken it. Having got so far, however, it seemed folly to return without accomplishing her object. She walked hastily down the Strand—fuller at that hour, perhaps, than at any other—till she came to the street she was in search of. It was unknown to her, and she stopped for an instant to read its name, when a voice murmured, close to her ear, "Can I help you in any way!"

A gentleman of middle age, wearing a light overcoat above his evening-dress, had addressed her. There was nothing offensive in his looks or manner, yet the girl shrank from him involuntarily. There seemed to be something of mock civility in his tone.

"No, sir, I thank you," she answered, curtly, and hurried up the street. To her great mortification, on reaching the shop which had been indicated to her she found it closed. It was really no great matter, but to her mind's eye at present, as happens to those new to trouble, each disappointment was magnified into a misfortune. With a sigh and a weary air she was about to retrace her steps, when they were once more arrested by the same person.

"I am sure you are in some difficulty," he said. "Pray, let me help you."

Her heart beat fast, and even on that crowded pavement she felt a sense of fear. Although she had no experience of such matters, nor had even read of them, she

was conscious that she was being subjected to insult. Her cheeks burned as with a living flame as she brushed by him (for he had placed himself in her way) and walked on as quickly as she could, without reply. It is the fashion among the smugly prosperous to affirm that if young ladies meet with annoyance when they walk abroad they have—in some degree, at all events—themselves to thank for it. In this matter smug prosperity—always on wheels, and above the reach of such annoyance—may sometimes err through ignorance, but more often is a wilful liar. Not content with their own immunity from such perils, it is the habit with many of the class significantly described as “carriage people” to deny its existence as regards their poorer sisters, or, when they hear of its occurrence, even to scornfully lift their eyebrows; but, as a matter of fact, poverty has no more cruel sting than the necessity it imposes upon youth and beauty to walk in London unprotected.

“The path of the poor is set with snares;
What are joys to the rich to them are cares;”

and the very loveliness which fills the mother’s heart with pride in the one case fills it with fear in the other.

As Mary Marvon turned into the Strand again she had to cross the box-entrance of a theatre, where, for a moment or two, she was delayed by the usual crowd. A gentleman on the pavement was offering his arm to a lady, magnificently dressed, who was getting out of her carriage. It was Mrs. Beckett, escorted by Mr. Ralph Dornay. For an instant Mary was in doubt whether she should not address her and claim her protection. That such a thought should have entered into her mind showed how great were her alarm and perturbation; something told her that hateful man was still pursuing her.

“Like one upon a lonely moor,
Who dares not turn his head,
Because he knows some loathsome thing
Doth close behind him tread,”

she was somehow aware of his presence. Her pride, however, sustained her; she suffered Mrs. Beckett and her companion to pass in without recognition, and hurried on.

She was again delayed, though for a shorter time, at the pit-entrance; and as she stood there the same cold, insolent voice whispered in her ear, "I am sure we are not strangers; I am certain I have seen that pretty face before." Her limbs trembled beneath her with indignation and fear, but she answered him nothing; then suddenly, with passionate eagerness, she exclaimed, "Charley! Charley!"

Charles Sotheran was passing into the theatre within a yard of her. He turned round quickly, and she seized his arm. "Some man is annoying me," she whispered. Charley's eyes flashed round upon the crowd behind her. "Pray make no disturbance," she pleaded, "but see me into a cab."

He led her, without a word, into the next street—a quiet one for that neighborhood—where there was a cabstand.

As he opened the door for her she noticed, in spite of her agitation, how deadly pale he was. In his heart he had already committed a murder upon "some person unknown." He was about to give her address to the cabman, when the man in the light overcoat lounged up. His object—as, unfortunately for him, Charley guessed—was to hear where Mary was going. It was an audacious thing to do, but it is a popular error which asserts that scoundrels are always cowards. This one, at all events, was not, though, of course, he did not know that Charley belonged to an athletic club, where he was champion of the light-weights. The latter had now no doubt about his enemy, for he read the recognition of him in Mary's frightened face. He knew that for her sake there must be no disturbance, no explanation, no row of any kind, and he took his precautions accordingly. He gave an address about three miles from her real one, and close at hand.

"I will give you a sovereign," said Charley to the cabman, with great distinctness, "if you will drive to Tottenham Court Road, and get us there within five minutes."

Then he turned. It did not take more than a second; and in the next the cab was rattling them up the street at the rate of ten miles an hour; but in that second he did

his work with great completeness. It was really a splendid combination of accuracy and despatch.

A dissolving view of a light overcoat on the pavement, with a man inside it without a hat, was all that Mary saw of it.

"Oh, Charley, what have you done?" she cried, not in any positive reprobation, it must be confessed, but with a certain alarm and horror at having been even the virtuous Helen of so dire a combat. "I really believe you knocked the man down."

"I have an impression to that effect myself," said Charley, without moving a muscle.

"But don't you think you may have hurt him?"

"Certainly not. A man of that kind is used, I should imagine, to be knocked down."

"Oh, Charley, how can I thank you enough?" said Mary; not in allusion, of course, to that particular service, of which she could hardly be supposed to approve, but to his having come to her assistance in so sharp a strait.

"There is nothing to thank me for," he answered, simply. "The obligation is on the other side. I enjoyed the thing very much, but I should like to have had a quarter of an hour with that gentleman all alone. I am sincerely obliged to you, however, for the opportunity, so far as it went. But how on earth came you in such company, Mary?"

Then she told him, not without an involuntary tear or two, the adventures of the evening. He looked very grave and grim.

"You think I am a foolish girl, quite unfit to take care of myself, or to fight the battle of life," observed she, pitifully. "But you see I am so new to it."

Their positions had suddenly been reversed by this shock of experience: Telemachus had become Mentor.

"You must promise me," he said, "that what has happened will be a lesson to you, and that you will never go out on any such expedition alone again."

"I will—I do," she replied, with a shudder of reminiscence.

When they came to the Tottenham Court Road Char-

ley stopped the vehicle. "We will get out here," he said, "and take another cab."

He thought it prudent, in case the gentleman in the light coat had been dropped too heavily, that the cabman should not be able to trace them. That personage pocketed his sovereign with almost as much admiration as satisfaction. "I never saw a man hit out from the shoulder more neatly," he observed at parting—a compliment which was accepted in the spirit in which it was given.

As they neared their destination Charley again stopped the cab. "I will leave you now, Mary, but you must let me come and look after you occasionally."

Of course she could not refuse him—her heart was too full of gratitude to him for that, not only for what he had done, but for what he had omitted to do. It had been very thoughtful of him—it was no vanity on her part to add, and very unselfish—that he had declined to see her home, where his companionship must needs have aroused curiosity, if not comment; and she felt too despondent—nay, too crushed and humiliated—to bear up in her old defiant manner against the shafts even of petty malice.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WAGES OF TOIL.

WHAT Mary Marvon had undergone in her first "struggle for existence" was "a lesson" to her in a far wider sense than that in which Charley had used the word. She had not been so simple as to imagine that skill and diligence are necessarily passports to success, even of the humblest kind; but she now learned, "by harsh evidence," that there are obstacles to a woman's earning her own livelihood which may well dishearten the bravest. It is not good, we are told, for man to live alone; but it is not only not good, but exceedingly difficult, for woman to do so. If Mary had had a sister, or even a friend of her own sex, matters would not have gone so hard with her. If her mind had not been so monopolized by her own troubles,

and she could have given it, as of old, to abstract questions, she would have understood now why the young and friendless of her own sex so often make such sad mistakes (as she used charitably to call them) as to matrimony. It is necessity, and not choice, which compels them; they take the first hand that offers protection and support, because they cannot procure them for themselves.

Mary Marvon, however, was the last person to sit down with folded hands and bemoan her fate while anything remained to be done in the way of remedy. After all, as she said to herself the next morning—when, if not joy, at least renewed hope comes to most of us—she was no worse off, as regarded the possibilities of maintenance, than she had been yesterday, though she had had some unpleasant experiences in her first effort to procure it. She resolved once more to call at the law-stationer's near the Strand; only, even in broad daylight (so seriously had her nerves been discomposed) she felt unequal to do so alone. She was therefore compelled to seek the companionship of Miss Julia, and, so far as the object of her visit was concerned, to take that lady into her confidence. She consented at once; nor did the confession of Mary's necessities seem in the least degree to prejudice her against her new friend. On the contrary, she expressed a very lively sympathy and compassion; misquoted with tears various couplets illustrative of her situation; and secretly made up her mind to compose a poem on the subject herself (to be called "The Orphan Toiler"), which should throw all her previous productions into the shade. The unwonted excitement of this affair, indeed, and her temporary freedom from Sister Sarah, raised Miss Julia's poetical feelings to a higher pitch than ever. She more than once broke out into quotations in the omnibus, which, being delivered, as usual, with appropriate tone and gesture, made a considerable sensation among the passengers, and even caused the conductor to make a communication through his hollowed hand to the driver, over their heads, to the effect that there was "a party inside who knowed how to patter like Tommy Tompkins"—some rival improvisatore, as it would seem, in omnibus circles. Even when they got out at Charing Cross Miss Julia was far

from desisting from her cuckoo-notes, and, the season being midsummer, was naturally reminded of Rogers's description of spring in town.

"I need scarcely remind one endowed with your marvellous powers of memory, my dear Miss Marvon, of that exquisite line suggested to my recollection by this neighborhood—

"When April verdure blooms in Golden Square."

Under other circumstances the notion of Golden Square as a bower, and the "furred beauty" coming to winter there, would have amused Mary very much; but what the present neighborhood suggested to her recollection was of a much more personal and painful kind. She almost expected to see blood on the pavement before the stationer's door, and a knot of people earnestly discussing the details of the catastrophe of the previous evening; nothing, however, could be more commonplace and every-day than the surroundings of the establishment. Mary walked in and made her application to the shopkeeper, while Miss Julia, with a delicacy that did her honor, waited outside.

"You have a type-writing machine of your own, I suppose, miss?" he replied, regarding a specimen of her handiwork through his spectacles with some curiosity. "Well, that will take the bread out of the mouths of a good many people in time, no doubt; but it's a precious dear article, as I understand, and it must take a person a longish time to work at it before he sees his money back."

"I don't mind work," said Mary, modestly, "and I find I can do more and more copy every day with less and less exertion."

"Um—ah, yes; it's fairly done enough, and beats our people's handiwork out and out," confessed the shopkeeper. "You shall have your share of the next batch of pleadings we have sent in. You have references, of course?"

Mary uttered a cheerful assent; she felt so grateful to this man for doing what it was his interest to do.

"We can only pay you, of course, at the usual rate," he added, with a glance at her neat dress. "Ours is not a line that requires fancy work, or affords fancy prices.

But you are not a novice, and know what to expect, no doubt."

"I suppose it will be the same," said Mary, hesitatingly, "as Mr.—that is, as the lawyer who employs me has hitherto paid me—sixpence a folio?"

"Sixpence—sixpence a folio!" exclaimed the man, in amazement. "You must have chanced upon a very rich lawyer, and, what is almost as rare, a lawyer that does not mind spending his money. Why, that's twopence a folio more than he gets from his own clients!"

"Are you sure of that—quite sure?" inquired Mary. "It is very sad news to me."

The old shopkeeper seemed touched by her dejected look and despondent tone.

"Well, of course I'm sure, young lady, since I've been in the trade this quarter of a century. What the lawyer pays us is but threepence, and then he gets a penny profit. If we gave threepence, therefore, what would there be for us to live upon? No, no; it is clear to me you've got a friend in court, and I recommend you to stick to him."

"But if what you say is true," sighed Mary, from a heavy heart, "one half of what I am paid is mere charity."

"Tut—tut!" returned the other, good-naturedly, "let him pay it. It's like enough you're an orphan. Just so. Well, do you suppose he hasn't had his whack out of orphans? If he has a freak to put down something in his ledger to their credit, don't balk him. Avoid the open market, where the stock is low, and stick to your preference share while it lasts. That's my advice."

The notion that Mr. Rennie had selected her as an exceptional orphan, to be nourished (at sixpence the folio) instead of being ruined in the usual way by law expenses, though to a certain degree gratifying to her *amour propre*, was by no means satisfactory to poor Mary. At the most, if the old stationer was to be believed, she could hope to go only a very little way towards restoring the average; but, truth to say, the idea of putting her employer at ease with his conscience was very little consolation to her. Upon the whole, though she gave him credit for good in-

tentions, she was very far from pleased with Mr. Rennie's conduct, the reason of which was only too plain to her. He had evidently treated her from the very first as a mere child, to be humored and not thwarted ; and, feeling sure that she would soon come to her senses, and apply to her friends for the assistance which pique or temper disinclined her to ask for, he had for the present, under the pretence of helping her to help herself, paid her a fancy price for her services. She no longer doubted that he had even given her work to do twice over merely to keep her employed—a cruel kindness indeed. Yet, was the operation of having her eyes opened less cruel ? It was now certain that threepence a folio was as much as she could expect for her work, even if she got it at first-hand (and how, except in Mr. Rennie's case, could she get it at first-hand ?)—a very scanty wage indeed, which brought down her expectations for the future fifty per cent. Nor was it to be hoped for that increased skilfulness or diligence could much improve her prospects. The possession of the type-writer, as the stationer had informed her, placed her in the front rank of her humble calling ; and it was anything but a consolation to her to learn that, poorly as she might be remunerated, the bread she did get would be “ taken out of the mouths ” of others.

Mary left her name and address with the shopkeeper, for however low the wages of toil might be they were preferable to those of charity, and he willingly enough undertook to send her work. She was still resolutely, almost doggedly, resolved to gain her own living, but the elasticity of mind with which she had commenced the attempt was gone. There is, no doubt, a very genuine nobility about independence ; but it is Nature's nobility, not Debrett's ; and the process of gaining it is often not only rough and difficult, but humiliating ; in the more humble walks of life it is no more to be attained without this drawback than the glorious arts of healing or of tendance are to be practised without the terrors of the dissecting-room or the horrors of the hospital ward.

The one item of congratulation for poor Mary in the whole affair was that Miss Julia was not a witness to her disappointment. He must be a friend indeed in whose

presence we can endure mortification without feeling it an aggravation of our woes.

Nor, when Mary rejoined her, did her companion, though she noticed her depression, importune her with questions. Garrulous by nature, Miss Julia was accustomed to put a bridle on her tongue in the awful presence of Sister Sarah; and she had sense enough to perceive that Mary was in no mood for talk, and respectfully abstained from it. She was careful to run no risk of offending the only friend she had ever made, and for whom she entertained an attachment as sincere and subservient as that of a dog for its master.

With the exception of a verse or two, culled from the poets and cast upon some inappropriate topic, like a garland on a hat-peg, Miss Julia, indeed, maintained an almost unbroken silence until they reached home, when something at Mr. Tidman's door compelled from her an ejaculation of admiration.

"Oh, Miss Marvon, did you ever? a carriage and pair, with a coachman in a white wig. It must be Mrs. Tidman's uncle's equipage come to take her for a drive in the Park."

"Very likely," said Mary, with indifference. Until lately such spectacles had not been portents to her; and as to Mrs. Tidman, it was only too probable, under the changed conditions of the "copy" market, that she would now have to seek a home with some less aristocratic landlady.

"Lor, Jane, who is it?" inquired Miss Julia, eagerly, of the maid who admitted them.

"It's a lady to see *you*, miss," returned the girl, addressing herself with respectful awe to Mary: "the name I can't remember if it was ever so, but she's been here an hour or more."

"They've found you at last, Miss Marvon," exclaimed Miss Julia, dramatically. "Something always told me that you were not what you seemed. You are the long-lost child of somebody or other, you may depend upon it."

Ridiculous as it was, poor Mary felt her color rise at this malapropos observation.

"There must certainly be some mistake," she murmured.

"No, miss, I heard the lady ask for you with my own ears," gasped the impressionable Jane. "The footman asked me first, but I felt all of a muddle like; the horses were going 'champ, champ,' as though they were eating through their bits, and throwing the foam about like milk out of a churn; and I do believe as I answered 'butter' or something, when the lady beckoned me to the carriage window and spoke to me with her own lips. I don't know what she was like except that she was gray and upright; but I am sure she was a real lady, because she was covered with lace and spoke so gentle. 'Does Miss Marvon live here?' she says. 'Yes, my lady,' says I, 'leastways, she's gone into the town with Miss Julia Blithers, this morning.'"

"There was no need to mention me, Jane," interpolated Miss Julia, modestly. "People of quality like to be answered 'yes' or 'no.'"

"Well, I think this lady was different, for she asked whether you were a friend of Miss Marvon, and when I said 'yes' she looked pleased. Then when I said I didn't know when you might be back, she said that was no matter, for she would come in and wait. And there she has been in the drawing-room ever since, all alone, except that everybody in the house, I do believe, has had a look at her through the key-hole."

Of all this Mary caught only the general sense that some strange lady, whose business was urgent, had called upon her. Her face was very pale and set. The conviction had flashed upon her that this was one of her father's relations—the very one, perhaps, that had hitherto supplied the funds for her maintenance, and who, having been informed of her position by Mrs. Sotheran, had now visited her for the first time to propose some arrangement for her future. For such an offer, it might well be thought, no hour could be more propitious than the present, in which Mary had just discovered for herself how rough is the road of life to those who have to travel by it without journey-money, or friends to cheer their way; but though she had discovered this, she had not experienced it. There

is an immense difference between expediency and necessity; and though the former affects common natures, it is only under the stern compulsion of the latter, if at all, that the finer sort can be induced to swallow their pride, which to their eyes wears only the modest hues of self-respect. Never did Mary feel less disposed for conciliation and submission than when she entered the presence of this unknown visitor, the knowledge of whose wealth and station filled her with a sort of antagonism, if not resentment, which to any other creature beneath that roof would have not only been unintelligible but seemed sheer midsummer madness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A NEW POSITION.

A TALL, venerable-looking woman, with a grave and noble air, but with a certain trembling in her limbs that betokened either weakness or emotion, rose as Mary entered, and came forward with outstretched hands to greet her. The gentleness in her face, heightened rather than detracted from by the dignity of her mien, was indescribable.

“You know who I am, I suppose, my dear?” she said, kindly.

“No, madam, I do not.”

It was a brusque reply, but it was not brusquely uttered. While feeling indignant that it should be taken for granted that she was aware of the identity of her unwelcome patroness, the sweetness of the other's manner, her age, her gentle looks, forbade any show of resentment.

Her visitor answered nothing, but produced her card-case, and perhaps from failing sight turned from Mary to the bow-window, where with the slowness of old age she proceeded to select a card. Then Mary noticed how in that delicate face were written the autographs of care or sorrow, and how time had dealt lightly with her, and fortune showered her gifts on her in vain, because of them.

The very cause of this, as she well understood, might be a reason for her holding herself aloof from her visitor : the woe that this woman had suffered might be the loss of the very son who had ruined Mary's mother in name and fame, but she could not refuse her a woman's pity.

"That is my name," said the old lady, after a long pause, and she put the card in Mary's hand—"Mrs. Beryl Paton."

"Mrs. Paton!" cried Mary, with an ejaculation partly of relief at finding all her suspicions groundless, and partly of genuine pleasure. "I have often heard of you from Mrs. Sotheran."

"And that is how I heard of you, my dear," was the quiet reply.

"Oh, yes, I recollect now," said Mary, with a faint flush, "you are acquainted with Mrs. Beckett; and she spoke of me to you—at least, so Charley said."

"Yes, she spoke of you to me," said the old lady, in an indifferent tone, that contrasted strangely with a certain intent and lingering look with which it was accompanied, "and did so in the highest terms."

"I ought to say, I suppose, that I am obliged to her," said Mary, coldly; "at all events, it was generous of her, as we did not part very good friends."

"Indeed! Well, she did not go into that, but I gathered from her that you had left her a little unexpectedly; and it has struck me that you might not have since succeeded in obtaining a situation quite to your mind, but be still in search of one."

Mary bowed assent. It was impossible for her to anticipate in speech any offer from her companion, who, on her part, showed no sign of relieving her from her embarrassment; indeed, she looked not only at a loss for words, but even for breath; her expression was earnest but perplexed; and though her lips moved, it was some moments before any sound broke from them. Even then her voice was very faint and low, and came in snatches, while from time to time she pressed her hand against her side with a distressful motion which reminded Mary of some picture she had seen, wherein a woman was stanching with a handkerchief her own heart's blood.

"If that is so," she went on, "and you think you could put up with the caprices of an old woman, Miss Marvon, it has occurred to me that you might come to me at Letcombe Dottrell. You will be near your old friend Mrs. Sotheran, you know," she added, hastily, almost eagerly, "and we should do our best to make you happy."

"But really, Mrs. Paton, I scarcely understand," stammered Mary. "Do you wish me to occupy the same position as I did with Mrs. Beckett?"

"Just so; something of that kind. Only, if there was anything distasteful, it can be remedied. There is not much going on at Letcombe Dottrell outside the Hall, but we have our own society. I think I can honestly promise you a comfortable home."

The last two words appeared in Mr. Tidman's prospectus, and were used to attract those persons whom the size and splendor of the establishment (which were dwelt upon in another place) might fail to allure to it; but common as was the phrase, it lost its conventional sense as spoken by Mrs. Paton; her voice was so gentle, her manner so earnest, that it was clear when she said "home" she meant it.

Mary's heart was almost too full for speech. The misery of her present position, which would have caused her to spurn with a sort of fierce despair any overtures of assistance from the quarter from which she had apprehended it, made this proposal seem like a helping hand reached down from heaven. The harsh experience and disappointments of the last few days had put her more out of heart and hope, as respected her future, than she had acknowledged to herself; and the eagerness with which she had snatched at this prospect of emancipation from her troubles brought home to her for the first time how deeply she had sunk in the slough of despondency, and how hopeless she had been of extrication. She would have welcomed gladly almost any method of gaining her own livelihood that promised peace and security; but what had been offered her was better than the best she could have hoped for. At Letcombe Dottrell she would be neighbor to one who, however she might have erred in judgment, had ever proved herself to be a loyal and loving friend; and, just

now, any one who had showed her kindness in old times, and was unassociated with her late bitter experience, was doubly dear to her. Of Mr. Beryl Paton she had heard much, and, upon the whole, what she had heard was greatly to his advantage; his very eccentricities seemed always "to lean to virtue's side," and become exaggerated types of benevolence; while, what was of much more importance to her, his wife, her future employer, appeared to be the very quintessence of gentleness and refinement.

If Mary had had any "knowledge of the world"—a phrase which usually not only implies an acquaintance with natures of the baser sort, but a familiarity with them that fails to breed contempt—she would have concealed her joy, and affected to weigh her visitor's proposal in the scales of advantage. If even she had been of a reasonably practical turn of mind, she would have made inquiry as to conditions, prospects, salary. But being, for all her cleverness and good sense, very simple, and unaccustomed to express herself otherwise than naturally, and being very thankful for what had happened, when Mrs. Paton mentioned that word "home" so earnestly, poor Mary fairly burst into tears.

This was foolish of her, and, as it would seem, unfortunate, for it affected her visitor in the most distressing way.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she cried, in a strange, frightened tone, "this will never do!" then rose and fled, as if to a sanctuary, to the bow-window, from which, with her back to Mary, she held forth upon the necessity of the control of the feelings. The advice was excellent; but what slightly detracted from it was the occasional break-downs, uncalled-for pauses, on the speaker's own part, during which it was evident that she was "giving way" herself.

"I am quite surprised at this conduct, my dear—you can't help it, of course, but you should try to help it—because it's a foolish weakness, quite unworthy of you, or of any person of sense" (pause and sob). "You must have had a very bad time of it here, I fear, to be so moved by such a commonplace offer; a hard and lonely lot" (pause, and prolonged weeping). "Pray understand that I only came here to make you a business proposal. It gives me

great pleasure to find that it meets your views, my dear, but there's nothing, nothing" (sob) "to cry about on either side—it's merely a matter of mutual convenience."

"I see that, I know that, at least so far as you are concerned, Mrs. Paton," said Mary, recovering herself. "I have no right whatever; and it is, I feel, not only weak, but very impertinent of me to—to—"

"Not impertinent—oh, no, very natural, my dear," put in the old lady.

"Yes, that must be my excuse," said Mary, eagerly, and brushing away the last tear; "it was only natural that such unlooked-for kindness in a stranger—"

Mrs. Paton, still standing with her back to her, shook her head.

"Perhaps I should have said 'such kindness in one who is personally a stranger'—yes, it moved me, madam, more than was meet, I know, but of late I have not been accustomed to kindness."

"Poor child! poor child! Pray don't"—here she held up her gloved hand for silence—"don't say another word. You must promise me never to give way again—never, never—at Letcombe Dottrell. Do you quite understand that? We must be cheerful, and quiet, and happy. You very much distress me (without your meaning it at all, I'm sure) when you shed tears."

"I am quite right now, Mrs. Paton," said Mary, smiling. "You needn't be afraid to look at me."

"Afraid! Why should I be afraid? And now, when can you come?"

She was once more standing face to face with Mary; her features pale as ashes, but not more pale than usual, and all trace of emotion swept away.

"Whenever you please," answered Mary.

"Very good; Mr. Rennie will arrange about that. I forgot to say that he is a friend of mine, or rather of my husband's, as well as of yours. It was he who first mentioned you to Mr. Paton. You will clearly understand that, if you please."

Mary had not understood this, nor did she see the necessity of so unimportant a point being insisted on, but of course she nodded consent.

"As to terms and duties," continued Mrs. Paton, "perhaps we had also better leave that to Mr. Rennie; that will make him responsible for the whole affair, as it were. Mr. Paton prefers everything of a domestic kind to be managed through his lawyer; it will therefore be more advisable, perhaps, not to speak to him of my present visit. Not, of course, that we have anything to conceal from my husband, but he is very peculiar."

Mary once more bowed her head; nothing that her visitor could have told her of Mr. Beryl Paton would have impressed her more than what she had already heard from others. "Peculiarity" was, she knew, a very faint term indeed by which to express his eccentricities.

Still, she hardly liked the notion of keeping Mrs. Beryl Paton's visit a secret from her husband and her own future employer.

"Mr. Rennie will arrange everything," continued her visitor, perceiving, perhaps, a trace of discomfort in the young girl's face. "You may dismiss all doubt and trouble about this matter from your mind. You will hear from me—no, not from me," she added, correcting herself with a certain anxious earnestness—"from him, to-morrow or next day. Until then, or rather till I see you, good-bye, my dear, good-bye."

As she spoke she drew towards Mary with a quickness of movement which could hardly have been expected in one of her advanced age, and, what was much more surprising still, stooped down and kissed her. The next moment she had left the room (scattering a little crowd of curious watchers and waiters in the little hall, who scuttled away at the noise of her approach like rabbits into their burrows), and opening the front door with her own hands, marched to her carriage, at which the footman, with a nut in his mouth (for he had been whiling away the hours with cracking and eating those unkindly fruits of the earth), had drawn himself up only just in time into that attitude of senseless stiffness miscalled "attention."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"WHY DID SHE CRY?"

POOR Mary, fluttered, astounded, kissed, knew not what to make of it all. What had happened to her within the previous eight-and-forty hours had been strange and eventful enough, but the occurrences of this last hour were little short of miraculous. Nay, to her they actually did seem a positive intervention of Providence in her favor. It is easy to smile at her; but there was faith and, what is sometimes better, gratitude in it. There is a great question nowadays about the power of prayer, about which this only can be set down for certain, that those who have proved its power will not easily be convinced of its impotence; but what had occurred to Mary was not certainly owing to any intercession, for she had used none. For the time, so utterly had she been disheartened that it had almost seemed that no power, human or divine, could help her. But now those noble lines came into her mind concerning him who is "more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than we desire," or have ventured to desire. She was very, very thankful.

I knew a man once in very serious straits, who used not to pray but to dream—though in his waking thoughts—of a certain enormous benefit befalling him; a particular benefit, yet coming from no particular quarter, and no more to be reasonably expected than the discovery of a diamond mine in his back garden; and suddenly, as if from the clouds, that very stroke of good-fortune did actually fall upon his favored head. From that moment till the day of his death, which was years afterwards, I don't think he forgot it for a single hour; and it shaped henceforth not only his life's course (for that was of necessity), but I do verily believe every movement of his mind. It remained in his memory like a beacon on a lofty down, seen from all points of it, and pointing upwards.

What had chanced to Mary Marvon was, by comparison, a cow-scratcher, or, let me rather say (for there was reverence in it), some small, upright stone such as marks, to some mother's eye, the resting-place of her little child, by none other remembered; but she never forgot it. She was fated to have experiences, good and bad, of a far graver kind. But this one, whether from its opportuneness or its unexpectedness, or possibly from the chain of events that followed, and of which it was the first link, was engraven on her heart forever. The whole scene—the scantily furnished room, the stately stranger, her words, her looks, and especially that seemingly impulsive, inexplicable kiss—recurred to her a thousand times. For the present, when her wonder had a little subsided, what struck her most was the small place in her memory which (even by hearsay) her visitor had previously occupied. Of Mr. Beryl Paton she had heard much and from many persons; but of his wife, though surely a remarkable personage, she had heard nothing—not even from Mrs. Sotheran; though she was, as Mrs. Paton had said, her near neighbor, and lived in the same village. Of the whole affair Mary was naturally inclined to say as little as possible; but what made her doubly reticent was the injunction her visitor had put on her. "It will be advisable," she said, "not to speak to my husband of my visit to you." Though this did not, of course, imply that she was to evade inquiry by an untruth, it suggested an unpleasant caution. And in speaking of the affairs of Mrs. Beryl Paton, of whom every one knew something, it was clearly needful to use an exceptional prudence.

In this matter, however, she reckoned not only without her host, but without her hostess, her fellow-guests, and, indeed, every creature in the establishment. The nut-cracking footman had been subjected to such an examination-in-chief during Mary's late interview with his mistress that he could scarcely have concealed from them, had the curiosity of his inquisitors taken that direction, the amount of his weekly perquisites, or the state of the barometer of his affections for the under-housemaid; and he had given up the name of his employer at the first summons.

"Well, my dear Miss Marvon, you *have* had a visitor," was Mrs. Tidman's observation as she tripped into the drawing-room on the tiptoe of expectation, and quite forgetful of the languor that becomes a baronet's own niece and the near connection of a Member of Parliament.

"I *do* congratulate you," simpered Mrs. Tiffin. "That is my notion of real carriage-people—the coachman with a wig, and the footman with such beautiful silk stockings that they seemed hardly silk stockings at all."

"So you have been among us all this time, Miss Marvon," said Miss Blithers the elder, in a complaining tone, "and never told us that you were acquainted with the Beryl Patons."

Concealment and finesse were thus rendered unnecessary. Mary had only to tell the simple truth that she had been offered an engagement by Mrs. Paton similar to that she had filled in Park Lane. Upon the whole, though disappointing as to dramatic effect, this news was rather a relief to her hearers. Folks, however fond of sensation, are not generally gratified by the elevation of their friends to rank or station, and the imagination of Miss Julia had pictured to these ladies that Miss Marvon had been discovered to be something "in her own right," and the heiress of tens of thousands per annum.

Even when Mary had assured her to the contrary, she shook her head and smiled incredulously.

"I am never mistaken, my dear Miss Marvon, in a presentiment," she said. "Matters may seem to you as you describe, but, believe me, you are on the threshold of great things."

The interpretation of which dark saying was that Miss Julia had selected Mary's supposed good-fortune for the subject of a poem, and had already composed several couplets, which only wanted what she somewhat prosaically termed "setting to rights;" and if her lines were not of that class of which it has been said that the world will not willingly let them die, she herself was very disinclined to let them perish immaturely, like tender twins, on account of a mere misapprehension.

Great as was her satisfaction at having found employment and the means of maintenance, Mary's contentment

was still more complete on this account, that she was in no degree indebted for her good-fortune to her father's relatives. They had made no efforts to assist her, and she thanked them for it; and she could now write to Mrs. Sotheran to inform her of what had happened, and of the pleasure it gave her to think of becoming her near neighbor, in all honesty and without reserve. It was, perhaps, for the first time that she now perceived how considerable had been that invisible barrier which Mrs. Sotheran's communication respecting her parentage had erected between that lady and herself. Having found the means of gaining her own livelihood, half the sense of humiliation attaching to her birth was at once removed, and she felt that she could resume relations with her old friend on something like the old footing.

What still troubled her somewhat, but not so much—for when a great weight is removed from us what is left seems, by comparison, no burden at all—was the means by which Mrs. Paton had been induced to visit her. Mary did not believe that it was in consequence, or, at all events, solely in consequence, of Mrs. Beckett's recommendation. Her pride, no doubt, disinclined her to believe it; but surely, if it had been so, Mrs. Paton would have made more than incidental allusion to that lady, and she had spoken of her very little. Charley Sotheran, though he might be credited with all the will in the world to serve her, could hardly have done so in this case. It was true that no disparity of position, such as might naturally have appeared to exist between himself and the mistress of Letcombe Hall, would have deterred the audacious Charley from applying to Mrs. Paton, or, for that matter, to her Majesty the Queen, on Mary's behalf; but, while absolutely free from any taint of snobbism, the young man had a fine sense of true propriety, and a due respect for what was worthy of reverence; and Mary rightly judged that he would have shrunk from making any such request as the one in question, or even from dropping a hint of it, to a lady of Mrs. Paton's years. There remained, then, Mr. Rennie, whose good-will towards her had already been manifested in so unmistakable a manner, and whose intimate relations with Mrs. Paton might easily have afforded an opportunity for

putting in a good word in her behalf. She had been inclined to be angry with him on account of his well-meant duplicity in the matter of the pleadings, and had even contemplated addressing him with some little resentment on that subject; but her anger, even then mitigated by gratitude, was now utterly swept away, and she resolved to await that visit from him which Mrs. Paton had told her to expect.

Nor had she to wait long; on the very next morning Mr. Rennie called upon her, and was ushered into that hall of audience with which we are acquainted. Its nakedness did not strike him as it had struck Charley. Perhaps he had held professional interviews in worse places, or perhaps he had matters on his mind which prevented his paying attention to mere surroundings. To judge by a certain dry, wise smile on his face he used on rare occasions for private wear, and which never betrayed itself to the clients who evoked it, he had come on a pleasant errand.

"How well you look, Miss Marvon," he observed, as that young lady presented herself with beaming face; "the air of the suburbs seems to agree with you even better than Park Lane."

"Perhaps it's the exercise," returned Mary, cheerfully.

"The exercise, ay; walking instead of driving."

"No; I mean the type-writer. Thanks to you, my fingers have been kept well employed."

"Oh, that; well, that was but a temporary measure. Of course it could never have been taken up as a serious occupation; but the way you 'buckled to' at it, as I told Mrs. Paton, was something amazing. We had the same difficulty in keeping you employed as with that insatiable ogre in the fairy story. What did they give him—ropes of sand to weave?"

Mary courtesied to the ground. "Thank you, sir."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mr. Rennie, in great confusion, "I had quite forgotten. It was not an ogre, was it? It was the—"

"Well, never mind," interrupted Mary, smiling. "I know you meant it for a compliment to my diligence; indeed, the legend has always seemed to me a sort of alle-

gory—a great employer of labor showing in his own proper person how easy it is to work.”

“Just so; and you seem to have found it very easy. My people could hardly find work enough for you, they told me.”

“That is why they sent the same work twice over, I suppose.”

“Did they, indeed?” returned Mr. Rennie, coolly. “Now I call that very clever of them—very clever. I shall compliment Mr. Jones about that.”

“I must say it was treating me rather like a child, Mr. Rennie.”

“But what a sagacious child you were to find it out. I should have thought one set of pleadings would have seemed just like another to you.”

“Perhaps you thought I was also deceived about the payment—my wages.”

“Good heavens! haven’t you been paid?” exclaimed the lawyer, with well-feigned horror. “I’ll dismiss Mr. Jones to-morrow.”

“Mr. Rennie, you are still trying to impose upon me,” said Mary, half amused, half angry.

“A lawyer,” he exclaimed, lifting his eyes to the ceiling (the whole scene, old and rusty as he was, was charming to him)—“a respectable family lawyer charged by his own client with deceit!”

“You know as well as I do, sir,” she continued, severely, “that you paid me just twice as much for my work as you ought to have done.”

“And even so we are not able to retain your services,” pleaded the lawyer, changing his ground. “Here’s ingratitude! here’s want of proper feeling between employed and employer! There are no feudal attachments in these days. You know, of course,” he added, in a graver tone, “that Mrs. Paton has sent me here to treat with you for a new engagement?”

“I know some one, who, whatever mistakes he may have made, has always shown himself a most kind friend to me,” said Mary, significantly—“has been interesting himself on my behalf with Mrs. Paton.”

A look of blank astonishment came into the lawyer’s

face. If it was acting, it was the very perfection of art, and, instead of being on the roll of solicitors, Mr. Rennie ought to have been on the boards.

"My dear young lady, you are laboring under an entire misapprehension," he answered. "I assure you that I never breathed your name to Mrs. Paton till she herself mentioned it. I did not know that her own lady-companion had left her; and even if I had—" He hesitated.

"You would have been unwilling to part with so cheap an employee as myself," put in Mary, incredulously.

"Well, no; I was about to say that the Beryl Patons are the very last people with whom I am acquainted in whose domestic affairs I should have ventured to interfere."

"Then it is a most extraordinary and inexplicable thing to me," said Mary, her eyes fixed upon the ground-glass window as if the explanation of the mystery were written on it.

The lawyer meanwhile regarded her with half-shut eyes, but with great intentness; the interest in her fair young face was not without a reflection in his own.

"I took it for granted," he said, "that Mrs. Paton had explained everything personally to you."

"On the contrary, she distinctly gave me to understand that I was to learn everything from you."

"Just so—as to the emoluments and the duties. The former, supposing that arrangement is agreeable to you, are to be the same as you received from Mrs. Beckett; and the latter, you are expected to read to her a little, and play to her—you do play, I know, on the piano now and then; and—well, I really don't think there was anything else."

"It seems a very easy way of getting one's livelihood," smiled Mary, who was contrasting it with another calling and its difficulties in her own mind, "and what the housemaids call an easy place."

"No doubt; but you must have gathered that much from Mrs. Paton herself."

"From her manner, yes; she seemed the kindest of employers. Her behavior, indeed, was gentle and considerate in a very remarkable degree."

It was not Mr. Rennie's custom to speak when his object was to obtain information from another, and he remained silent now. His grave and quiet smile, however, encouraged his companion (as perhaps it was meant to do) to go a little further into matters.

"It seems ungracious, and even ungrateful, dear Mr. Rennie, to hint at such a thing; but since we are talking, as I suppose, quite confidentially, may I venture to ask if Mrs. Paton is not considered a little eccentric?"

"No, no," he answered, with the air of a man who is thinking of something besides what he is talking about, "not at all. Her husband, many people will tell you, is as mad as a March hare; but she, though she has had trials enough to drive her mad, poor woman, is sane enough."

"I did not mean that," said Mary, with a quick flush. "I am very sorry to have led you to believe so even for an instant. But I thought her manner a little strange; it was trouble, no doubt—of which, of course, I knew nothing—that has so softened her heart to others."

"Ah, she gave you *that* impression, did she?"

Mary nodded. The recollection of Mrs. Paton's kindness, and of that kiss at parting, combined with what she had just heard, affected her very much. She was resolved to do what in her lay to comfort and console this gentle lady.

"Cried a bit, perhaps?" suggested the lawyer, with a quick look.

"I think so; I am afraid so; though she strove to hide it. I suppose the remembrance of her sorrow often recurs to her."

"No doubt. She lost her only child; and the sight of any young person—like yourself, for instance—is a reminder of it."

"But it was her son?"

"Yes, and not a chicken either; very much older than you, for instance. Still, women—I beg your pardon, mothers—are so queer: the least association of ideas is sufficient to set them off."

"Poor woman! poor woman!" sighed Mary.

"Yes, that was it, 'and nothing more,' as the poet

says ; and, now I think of it, it must have been upon Mrs. Beckett's recommendation that she came here."

"She did mention Mrs. Beckett's name," said Mary, "but not quite in that way."

"Of course not, and for this reason : she had heard of you from Mrs. Beckett, and heard nothing but good ; but, on seeing you, she took a fancy to you for your own sake. I don't say it was not natural ; quite the reverse. Did it not seem so, now, to yourself ?"

"Perhaps it did," said Mary, thoughtfully. "That was, no doubt," she added, with a forced smile, "why I thought her eccentric."

"On the contrary, it was a proof of her sound judgment. To me all's as clear as daylight. And, now that the preliminaries are settled—for I suppose they *are* settled—can you tear yourself away from Tidman's and start to-morrow for Letcombe Dottrell ?"

"I could start to-day," said Mary, confidently. She was not one of those women who travel with arks for luggage, filled, not with pairs, but with two dozens of everything, and whose movements are dominated by the punctuality of a laundress.

"Very good. The Patons will go from the Paddington station by the 10.10, and you will meet them on the platform. One word more, my dear young lady, which is quite between ourselves. You'll find a very queer collection of human curiosities at Letcombe Hall ; to my mind, all rubbish. Keep yourself *to* yourself, and touch them only with your finger-tips." And, with a kind smile and a hearty squeeze of the hand, the lawyer took his leave.

With his explanation of her relations with Mrs. Paton, Mary was, on the whole, satisfied ; but Mr. Rennie himself left the house with his chin in his hand—a sure sign with him of mental disturbance. "The girl was right," he mused. "How clever they are, these women, even the youngest of them, up to a certain point ! It was not Mrs. Beckett's eulogies that induced Mrs. Paton to seek out our young friend yonder. There was something personal—*personal*," he repeated, striking the ferule of his umbrella upon the ground ; "and yet what could it have been ? I never saw the old lady take a line of her own

before. 'There is no necessity,' she said to the girl, 'to trouble my dear husband about it.' A wife always says 'dear husband' when she is about to deceive him. That Mrs. Paton, however, of all wives in the world, should venture on such an experiment amazes me. I wish she had not done me the honor of taking me into her confidence—though, indeed, she took me but a very little way. Beryl Paton is a dangerous man to hoodwink, albeit he puts the blinkers over his own eyes so often. What *can* be at the bottom of it, I wonder? I am quite sure, for all their sakes, that I did right in quieting Miss Mary's suspicions; but I wish I could quiet my own. The old lady cried, did she? It was a bright thought of mine to take that for granted; nine women out of ten can do it at will, and the tenth can't help it; but Mrs. Beryl Paton is one in a thousand. Why did she cry?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE JOURNEY DOWN.

THERE are few things so characteristic of youth as its yearning for the country.

"The wave of the meadow grass,
The shadows thin and cool
That fall and flicker and pass
Athwart the face of the pool,"

seem to be a panacea to them for all woes. For the mature "the wild joys of living," especially that of "leaping from rock up to rock," are not so attractive. For my part, I confess I have arrived at that period of life when, after two or three days of Arcadia, the place begins to pall. A wet day in the country, without whist or with only the whist of the aborigines, turns my thoughts in the direction of self-destruction. But I can remember, alas! when it was not always so; when the country freshened me up instead of casting me down, and the very thought of changing the murky atmosphere of town for "the cool, sweet mountainous downs" (the Lake District

was then my passion) set my veins in almost as great a ferment as the sight of the fair object of my affections.

As Mary Marvon lay awake that night thinking of the strange things that had happened to her within the last twenty-four hours, and of the new life that she was about to enter upon, the reflection that it would be passed in the country occupied the foreground and gladdened her to the core. Until she went to Park Lane she had never been in London; and her residence there, though short, had been full of bitter experiences. In leaving town she flattered herself she would leave her troubles behind her, and that in country scenes she would recover the peace and contentment she had formerly enjoyed, and once more be her old self. Mr. Rennie, indeed, had hinted at "the collection of human curiosities" at Letcombe Hall, and she had understood from Charley and others that it was Mr. Beryl Paton's whim to fill his house with celebrities of a somewhat miscellaneous kind; but, surely, they would have little to do with her; she would take long walks in the morning before these eminent personages were astir, and her duties and her own occupations would make her wholly independent of them for the rest of the day.

It is fortunate, perhaps, that while arts and accomplishments increase and multiply with us in all directions, the gift of prophecy is still rare, and that especially the pictures we draw of our own future are generally as little like it as the putty-faced babe resembles the parent of whom it is said, by those who wish to flatter him, but have a strange way of doing it, that it is his "perfect image." The parting with her fellow-lodgers at Tidman's did not, it must be confessed, much distress Mary. The hand-shake of Mr. Tidman himself perhaps affected her most, for she knew it to be genuine. He told her, in confidence, but with an honest candor that eliminated from the confession anything tender or clandestine, that she was "worth the whole lot" of the guests whom she left behind her.

Mrs. Tidman besought her to let her know by letter whether things at Letcombe Hall were carried on in the same way as she had many times described them to be at the Manor, Slopton, in the time of her uncle, Sir Anthony.

Miss Blithers the elder, who believed in sortilege, pre-

sented her with a tract—drawn at random from a whole sheaf of them—against gluttony.

The grass widow and the ought-to-have-been West India heiress each made a clean pocket-handkerchief damp with their tears. Miss Julia was too much affected to witness her young friend's departure, but bade her an impassioned farewell in her own bedroom, and pressed into her hand a parting gift of priceless value, the last leaf of her autograph-book, containing the envelopes addressed to her by eminent personages under her various aliases.

"You," she said, struggling with her sobs, "you, my dear, dear friend, will know how to appreciate it."

The whole household, except Miss Julia, accompanied the departing guest to the door-step, on which they stood waving their handkerchiefs, and so picturesquely grouped that Mr. Tidman, struck with the splendid opportunity of advertising his establishment, besought them to retain their positions till a photographer could be summoned. No sooner had Mary Marvon arrived at the station—which, being a very sensible young woman, she did some time before the appointed hour—than one of the most gentlemanlike persons imaginable, with the mien of a bishop and the smile of a diplomatist, addressed her by name.

"I have orders, miss," he observed, perceiving that his sagacity had not deceived him as to her identity, "to relieve you of all care of your luggage."

That so superior a being should stoop to so menial a task struck her as so incongruous that it was quite a relief to her mind to find this done by deputy. An immense footman, with a shoulder-knot like a drawing-room bell-pull in hysterics, at once pointed out her little possessions to the porter, and then ushered her into a saloon carriage with "Retained" upon it.

The platform was presently pervaded by the Beryl Paton liveries: the horses belonging to that philanthropic millionaire were being coaxed into boxes, and his carriages fastened on trucks. Common curious people flattened their noses against Mary's carriage windows, to gaze upon the supposed possessor of so much property and privileges.

It may be an ignoble aspiration, but in this manner

should I myself always like to travel—at some one else's expense, and as "companion to a lady."

Within two minutes of the starting of the train, and when Mary, flushed and uncomfortable, had almost made up her mind to own herself an impostor and purchase a third-class ticket, arrived on the scene of bustle and confusion the chief personages of the drama, collected, cool, and indifferent, yet with the air of the whole terminus, bookstall (though that was, of course, W. H. Smith & Co.'s), traveling post-office, and locomotive, belonging to them. Mary thought she had never seen so remarkable a looking man as upright, gray-bearded Beryl Paton, in her life; with his impassive face and commanding air, which had nevertheless a certain gentleness about it, he seemed to her a sort of Redgauntlet.

"Who is this in the carriage, madam?" she heard him whisper to his wife.

Then Mrs. Beryl Paton, putting up her gold eye-glasses and nodding graciously to Mary, observed, "I think, my dear, it must be Miss Marvon—the young lady of whom I spoke to you as having been engaged in Miss Gwynne's place."

The old man bowed in an old-fashioned style, but stared a little hard, which made Mary exquisitely uncomfortable and rather frightened. His wife whispered something in his ear.

"Oh, indeed," he said aloud, as if starting from a reverie—"an orphan!" then, holding out his hand, observed, in gracious tones, that he was glad to see her, and hoped she would find Letcombe Dottrell to her liking.

There was quite a library of books and a great pile of newspapers upon the table, from which Mary was invited to take her choice. She selected one of the latter at hazard, glad to hide herself behind its ample columns, but little inclined to read.

Mr. Beryl Paton had also a newspaper and his wife a book; and every now and then Mary could not resist stealing a glance now at one, then at the other of them. It was not only that her fate was in their hands, but that they themselves interested her immensely.

More than once she noticed that Mrs. Paton was regard-

ing her husband with a look in which apprehension and affection were strangely blended, and once she caught her eyes turned upon herself with the same wistful expression that she had observed in them on the occasion of that lady's visit to her.

Presently Mr. Paton filled a meerschaum pipe of curious workmanship and retired into a compartment communicating with the saloon, to smoke, and his wife and Mary were left alone together.

"You found something, I think, in your paper just now that interested you, my dear?" said Mrs. Paton, gently.

Mary was very pleased to be addressed thus familiarly by her new employer, but the information that she had been so closely watched a little alarmed her.

"It was a paragraph about Mrs. Beckett," she answered; "it seems that she is going to marry Mr. Ralph Dornay."

"Dear me! that will be a very unequal match, will it not? She must be twenty years his senior."

"You are thinking of Mr. Edgar Dornay, madam—Mr. Ralph's nephew."

"To be sure. I had forgotten he *had* an uncle. My husband knows something of Mr. Edgar—was concerned with him in some scheme, I think, for improving the domestic taste of the lower classes. It struck me that your late landlord, Mr. Tidman, might have benefited from the good advice of some such society; the drawing-room paper was salmon and blue."

"Perhaps Mr. Tidman would have defended it upon the ground of appropriateness, since salmon is accustomed to that tint," said Mary, smiling, not at her own little joke, but at the idea of Mr. Tidman (in his shirt-sleeves) listening to a lecture on the ornamentation of his drawing-room (on which he especially prided himself) from the emissary of an æsthetic club.

"You don't think much of ornament, I fancy," said the old lady graciously, and with a grave smile.

"Nay, I like what is pretty, and I don't like salmon and blue," answered Mary; "but I do think too much stress is laid on such things, while matters of much higher moment, and involving much higher consideration, are neglected."

“Ay, my dear, ‘the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit,’” murmured the old lady, softly; “that is the best style of decoration, is it not?”

“I think, at all events, the good-taste of the heart is more important than that of the eye,” continued Mary; “and it is in the former, as it strikes me, that the upper classes are themselves wanting. They are often hard and selfish, fickle and false.”

Mary was thinking of certain matters within her own experience, but also with some reference to the treatment of her own mother by her father and his relatives, and her tone had a bitterness of which she herself was unaware.

“They have no necessity to work, you see,” said Mrs. Paton, gently; “and idleness, as we know, is the root of all evil.”

“There are excuses to be made for them, no doubt; but what I resent is the affectation that they do not need excuse, and their assumption that they are better, as well as more fortunate, than other people. I have heard it said by one of themselves that, taken man for man and woman for woman, they are morally equal to any other class—which is as much as to say that flattery and prosperity and idleness have done them no harm at all; or rather that, being angels to start with, they have done them only so much of harm as equalizes them with ordinary mortals who have by necessity escaped those evil influences.”

“It is God only who can weigh us fairly, my dear,” said the old lady, solemnly, “and make allowance for the circumstances in which we are placed.

‘The slave and tyrant alike account must render,
The one of his sceptre, the other of his chain.’

He alone can judge us according to our deserts.”

“Still,” said Mary, thoughtfully, “I think the world would be a better place to live in if the people in it would try to estimate their neighbors at their true value, according to the amount of genuine metal in them, without regard to the guinea’s stamp.”

“Your opinions are rather alarming, my dear,” said the old lady, laying her hand upon the young girl’s shoulder.

“I am too old myself to be a convert to anything—an old-fashioned, foolish person, whose vote is not worth winning—but I foresee one thing—you will win Mr. Beryl Paton’s heart.”

It was already inclined towards her, to judge by his manner when he came back from the smoking-room. He was not so great a philosopher but that he felt well inclined towards youth and good looks, while the fact of Mary’s being an orphan told in her favor with him in two ways. It awoke his pity for her unprotected condition, and it cleared the way for him for the exercise of benevolence (his favorite pleasure), the chief obstacle to which, as he always maintained, was the existence of obnoxious relatives. Philanthropy, as he affirmed, could do nothing for A because of her drunken father; for B, because he had a son addicted to forgery; while D herself was the very pink of propriety, but had a sister who so restored the average that association with her would have compromised the bench of bishops—reflections which, though founded on fact, in truth arose with him not so much from general observation of life as from his personal experience of it, and sprang from the recollection of a worthless son.

As they drew near their journey’s end Mr. Paton pointed out to Mary certain objects of local interest—the river which, miles away, ran through the park, and Dottrell Knob, the great “barrow” on the downs, that towered behind it. Though he had travelled so long and so far, his native place was very familiar to him, and he spoke of it with an interest she had never seen displayed in respect to inanimate objects, and with a pathos she could not understand. All that eye could reach, to the right hand and to the left, so far as man, the trustee, could be said to possess such things, was his own; so it had been with his father, and his father’s father before him, but so it never would be again. In a little while—in a few years at most—the reins would drop from his hands, and woods and fields and farms would own—no, nature does not own a human master—would submit, let us say, in contemptuous silence to a change of hands.

Of course, he did not know who would succeed him.

Relatives, "thank Heaven," as he would cynically say, he had none, but he had made certain arrangements for the disposal of his property—possibly final ones, though, as he had made half a dozen wills before, this was by no means certain—but arrangements that gave him no satisfaction, and which he was well aware would be bitterly resented by all but the favored few.

Mary was genuinely interested in all he said, though his air of proprietorship in the landscape affected somewhat perilously now and then her keen sense of humor, while, on his part, the old gentleman was charmed with her manner (novel to him, as his was to her), agreeable as it was, without flattery or conciliation, independent without self-assertion, and, now that her shyness had disappeared, natural as the trill of the song-bird. He confessed to himself that his wife had done well, indeed, in the selection of her new companion.

What pleased him most, as Mrs. Paton had foretold, was Mary's opinions upon social matters, which now and then peeped out, as opinions always will do when they are not the echoes of those of others, but convictions. That aspiration of hers for estimate by desert was also his own; it had been the aim of his life to encourage promotion by merit; but as yet it had with him no personal association with Mary's own case. This it was, perhaps, which secretly attracted him to her most of all. Under the roof to which they were tending there was a score of people, guests and friends, as they called themselves, but who, as he well knew, were his clients, whose aim and end it was to please him for their own advantage. At present it was hardly likely that this girl could have any such object, and therefore in thus pleasing him she gave a tenfold pleasure.

Mrs. Paton said nothing; but her ears were open, and the signs of contentment in her husband's face, which she could read so well, though to others they told nothing, filled her heart with secret joy.

An open barouche with four horses and postilions—a mode of progress Mr. Beryl Paton always used in the country—met them at the station, and whirled them, always ascending, through deep lanes and wood-fringed roads, to Letcombe Dottrell.

"That is Mrs. Sotheran's cottage," said Mrs. Paton, softly, as they passed by the widow's door. "Mrs. Sotheran is an old friend of Miss Marvon's," she added, in explanation, to her husband.

The old man nodded with an indifferent air.

"A good matron who has had her trials," said he. "Though they have passed by, they seem to have left their weight behind them. She always gives one the notion of the woman who learned the Freemasons' secret by accident and could never get it off her mind. Here are our lodge gates, Miss Marvon. What is it? A glass of water? By all means."

"It is not for me, sir; I think Mrs. Paton is a little overcome by the heat of the weather."

Indeed, though her husband had not noticed it, the old lady, whether prostrated by the fatigue of the journey or by some other cause, had suddenly fainted away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

COMING HOME.

THE scene was rather a singular one—the barouche, with its four smoking horses; the postilions, their dread of their master overcome by curiosity, turning back on loose stirrup with a hand on their saddle, to gaze on what was going on in the carriage; one obsequious footman (the other had already started for the village doctor) with a huge brown jug of water, as though his mistress was to be treated hydropathically, or be subjected to baptism by immersion; Mrs. Paton herself fallen back in her seat, her whole face with a pallor on it like flake-white on dead-white; Mary fanning her with one hand, while she sheltered her with a sunshade with the other; and Beryl Paton, grim and gray as Time with his hour-glass, holding the glass of water, ready to administer it by aspersion or otherwise, as Mary might direct. For the moment the young girl, who had that gift of tendance with which her sex is so often endowed, was mistress of the situation.

"She is getting better; she will be herself directly," she said, in answer to the old man's look of inquiry. Then, forgetting their unfamiliar relations in her anxiety for the patient, she added, "Has she ever been so before?"

"Yes," answered Beryl Paton, his brow darkening as he spoke. "Why do you ask?"

She had asked because she felt that if Mrs. Paton were subject to such attacks this must be a more serious matter than she had at first imagined—a deduction she would have been loath to express in any case. In the face of her companion's evident displeasure, she now remained silent. Perhaps he perceived that he had frightened her, for he continued, in a still grave but gentler tone,

"She has been attacked like this three or four times; not, however, for many years."

He might have added, had he chosen to do so, that all these attacks had been evoked by the same source—which, however, could hardly be the case in this present instance—namely, some apprehension, or ill news, with reference to her son. The last occasion had been a curious one. Her son had been long dead, and that circumstance had been notified by her husband to his friends by a curt funeral card—a method he employed to avoid unpleasant questioning, and at the same time to mark the relations between him and the deceased. Of this, though she knew her Harry was no more, Mrs. Paton was ignorant, the whole subject being rigidly tabooed to her. One day, when unwinding some silk belonging to Mary's predecessor, her late companion, she suddenly came (disclosed by its last strand) upon this very notification:

"In memory of Harry Paton; died (in New York), aged 25."

Until that moment she did not even know where her only son *had* died, and the unexpectedness of the information had been a shock beyond her powers of endurance, already sorely tried. Life itself for some time seemed to have fled from her, and the doctors had warned Mr. Beryl Paton that for the future his wife must "avoid all excitement"—a phrase they have for intimating that life hangs on a hair. Under any other circumstances Beryl Paton would have been all anxiety and tenderness. If his dog

had had a fit he would have been more touched than many men by the illness of their child; how much more, then, might he have been expected to feel at this sign of weakness in a wife who, but for one flaw, was in his eyes dearer than gold to a miser. Unhappily, it was this very flaw to which this shock had flown; she had broken down—as was only natural—where she was weakest. And even in that hour, when Death had seemed to reach out his hand to her, her husband could not forgive her. It was not weakness, he said to himself, but wickedness, to be thus affected by the recollection of a worthless reprobate.

But what he did not say even to himself, but bitterly felt, was that it was also rank disloyalty. This dead lad had been not only his bane, but his enemy; it was from no lack of will and malice that he had not doomed his father to a life within stone walls. And yet, forsooth, at the mere reading of this scoundrel's name the wife of his bosom, Beryl Paton's wife, forgetting all wifely love and sympathy, must needs swoon away.

It was the recollection of that incident, so nearly a catastrophe, which had made his face grow stern when Mary asked, "Has she ever been so before?" But a minute's consideration, in which he recognized his own unreason, changed the channel of his thoughts, and he became at once all gentleness and anxiety. This attack, which could certainly have no reference to the matter so distasteful to him, must needs, he perceived, be all the more serious on that account. The old warning words of the doctor, from which he had gathered that his wife's life was a precarious one, rang in his ears; and though there was division between them—that Bluebeard's chamber which he had forbidden to her, nay, bricked it up, as it were, against all entry, but after which she hankered—his heart beat tenderly for the bride of his youth, the companion of his life for half a century, and the only being (save, perhaps, his faithful mute) who kissed his hand for his own sake, and not for what it held.

"Thank God, she is getting better; is she not, Miss Marvon?" he whispered, eagerly.

"Yes, sir, yes; the attack is passing off. Let us get home; she will be better for moving through the air."

"Quite right; a sensible young woman," assented the old man, who often spoke, as men in years and power do, without knowing, or perhaps caring, whether he spoke aloud or aside.

In a few moments after they began to move Mrs. Paton opened her eyes with a murmurous sigh.

"She is saying something," said her husband, with fretful impatience. "Good heavens! she wants something!"

Mary, who was sitting on the back seat, leaned forward, and with her quick young ears caught the whispered word. It was "Lily."

"That is what she calls her friend at Bank Cottage," explained Mr. Paton. "Go, Charles, and fetch Mrs. Sotheran at once."

In an instant the remaining footman had jumped from his seat and was away upon his errand. If the matter had been less urgent his speed would have been the same. Whatever was done for Beryl Paton was done quickly.

The carriage whirled on without a check till it drew up at the front door of the house. Quite a little crowd of guests were awaiting it beneath the portico, to welcome their host and hostess.

"Make way, if you please, ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Paton, raising his hat, but with little ceremony in his tone; "my wife is somewhat indisposed. Miss Marvon, you will be kind enough to accompany Mrs. Paton to her room."

Mary was conscious of a throng of strangers parting to left and right as she passed through the stately hall, with Mrs. Paton leaning somewhat heavily on her arm; but she little guessed that their looks of interest and curiosity were directed to her rather than to the lady of the house. Mrs. Paton was a known factor in the establishment—if, indeed, a cipher can be called a factor—but Mary Marvon was an unknown one; and therefore, where all was speculation, the subject of very considerable comment.

Words are often of weight in proportion to the importance of those who speak them; and so it was in this case. If Mrs. Paton had asked Mary to accompany her up-stairs there would have been little or no deduction to have been

drawn from that circumstance ; but it was Beryl Paton's own lips that had put his wife in charge of her new companion, which was quite another thing.

Without at all understanding this, Mary perceived that she had been placed in a position of trust such as could hardly have been looked for on such very short acquaintance with her employer ; and this feeling was intensified when, on the prompt appearance of Mrs. Paton's own maid, her mistress thus replied to her anxious inquiries :

"I have been a little faint, Scarsdale, thank you; but I am better now. You will in future take this young lady's orders—Miss Marvon—as from myself."

Scarsdale shut her eyes and bowed her head with Oriental humility; but what she was thinking to herself was not so Oriental.

"Hoity toity; what's all this about? Who is this young person who is put over *my* head, which Miss Gwynne" (Mary's predecessor) "never was?"

Nor was this the only shock received by the confidential maid. Scarcely had she removed her mistress's travelling apparel when Mr. Flay, the village doctor, was announced ; whereupon Mrs. Paton observed, "You will be so good as to remain with me, Miss Marvon."

At this Scarsdale's normally high complexion rose to the hue of scarlet, and, with an obsequious obeisance, she retired, muttering, "Well, I never!" an observation which, I am sorry to say, when she got her breath again (of which astonishment had deprived her), she supplemented with, "Drat the girl!"

So difficult it is even for the best-disciplined persons, and with the example of the highest circles before their eyes, to restrain the emotion of jealousy.

It was fortunate that Mr. Flay, who was rather old and very stout, and had come at great speed on foot on his errand to the great house, was not called upon to undertake on the instant any delicate scientific operation; and it was a relief to him to have to listen to Mary's account of what had taken place as regarded his patient, during which he had only to gasp "Just so," and incline his head with much intelligent significance.

"Most accurately and ably stated," was his remark when she had finished her narrative. "If you will allow me to say so, Mrs. Paton, I think you have found a treasure in this young lady."

He said this partly because it was his principle to lose no opportunity of making friends with those who might be useful to him, and partly to put his patient at her ease previous to his more personal inquiries. So far from succeeding, however, in this last object, it almost seemed that his words had produced the very contrary effect to that which he had intended. Mrs. Paton's face again grew pallid, and she pressed her hand against her side as though in pain.

"You feel the oppression of the weather very much, I perceive," he said, soothingly; "I have many similar cases among the higher ranks just now."

Mrs. Paton nodded assent. "I shall feel better presently," she said, faintly.

"No doubt, as the heat of the day declines. Moreover, you have had a long and fatiguing journey."

Again she smiled adhesion. It was, so far, one of those interviews between doctor and patient in which each understands the other while tacitly agreeing to misrepresent the matter in hand.

"You had some slight attack of the same nature, I remember, madam, some time ago. Let me see," said the doctor, affecting an effort of memory; "it must be nearly five years back."

"It was just five years."

"Ay, ay; but this one has not been nearly so serious. That is the normal course; they grow slighter and slighter till the constitution asserts itself." The expression on the patient's face here so changed its character, becoming, in short, one of absolute incredulity, that Mr. Flay felt some modicum of truth-telling to be imperative. "That is," he added, "if no mental disturbance is experienced. Anything in the nature of a shock is likely—ahem!—to be detrimental."

"What Mr. Flay means," said Mrs. Paton, turning, with sudden gravity, to the astonished Mary, "is that an old woman like me, my dear, with a weak heart, is likely to go

off at any moment. Well, well, I know you will do your best, doctor. Is it to be the drops again?"

"I think we cannot do better than the drops, Mrs. Paton. They are my own prescription; but, if you remember, Sir Toby was so good as to say they were what he would have recommended himself."

So the mask was dropped, for some reason best known to the patient herself, and Mary understood at once that her new employer's life and her own fortunes (though of this latter she thought nothing, her heart was too full of sympathy for another) hung on a thread.

"You must permit me to say, Mrs. Paton," said the doctor, remonstratingly, "that you take a too cheerless view, which is itself depressing and—yes, deleterious. Why should a lady in your position, surrounded by all that can make life smooth and delightful" (here he looked round the sumptuous room, and then through the open windows, where, as far as eye could reach, stretched "the Paton estate"), "be exposed to shocks? You must not fidget yourself about trifles."

"Hush! is not that Mrs. Sotheran's voice?" interrupted the invalid, eagerly.

"I think it is; but why should that excite you? You are really very wrong, madam, to be so moved by nothing at all. It is an injustice to yourself, hard upon your husband (who holds you as the apple of his eye), and hardly fair (if I may say so) to the humble individual who has the honor to be your medical attendant."

"I will try and be fair to you," said Mrs. Paton, smiling; "but I really think, if you will permit it (and she looked significantly towards the door), a visit from dear Lily will do me as much good as your drops."

"By all means, take 'em both," said Mr. Flay, naïvely. "If you will remember the different positions of poor Mrs. Sotheran and yourself—what she has gone through and suffered, I mean, and your own comparative immunity from trouble—and reflect upon it, I think she will do you good. It will teach you not to exaggerate any little unpleasantness. Excuse my freedom, my dear madam, but it is for your own benefit."

"I am sure of it," said Mrs. Paton, kindly, holding out

her hand. "Mr. Flay and I, Miss Marvon, are very old friends."

"Yes, yes, indeed, and I hope you and I will be old friends," said the doctor, as he made his adieu to Mary. "There is something in your face that I seem to remember, though your name is unfamiliar to me— You are not as you should be yet, Mrs. Paton," he added quickly, but firmly. "Is this brandy? Then just take a little."

He poured out a few drops from a toilet-bottle of that liquor, which, by medical direction, Mrs. Paton always had at hand, and put it to her lips. The color returned to them at once. "I am quite well now," she murmured; then added, smiling, but with evident effort, "I call you to witness, Miss Marvon, that that brandy was administered to me by force."

"Miss Marvon must administer it to you again whenever there is need for it—when her color goes as it did just now, you know," he added, in a hushed parenthesis. "I shall look in to-morrow, madam, to issue my bulletin of 'Convalescent;' until then, *au revoir*."

On the great staircase he met Mrs. Sotheran coming up usherless, as was her wont, to her friend's room; she had been talking to the lady's-maid on the landing, and looked more frightened and nervous even than usual.

"Now, what has that vinegar-cruet Scarsdale been saying to you, Mrs. Sotheran?" inquired the doctor, sharply: "killing her mistress before her time, no doubt—which shows her to be a fool as well as a liar; since it is slaying the goose that lays her the golden eggs."

"No, indeed, Mr. Flay," remonstrated the poor lady; "she was only saying that Mrs. Paton has a new companion, and somehow doesn't seem to take to her—for which I am truly sorry."

"Why should you be sorry? It is a far greater compliment to the young lady than if she liked her. You may take my word for it, that Miss Marvon is worth a dozen of her predecessor and a gross of Scarsdales. A very nice, ladylike girl, and full of common-sense, of which there is not a halfpennyworth in this house, and, for that matter, very little in the whole parish;" and Mr. Flay nodded his

head defiantly, as though he would have added, "Bank Cottage included."

"I am truly glad to hear you say so, Mr. Flay—I mean as regards Miss Marvon; she and I have known one another for years."

"I shouldn't have thought it," said the doctor, curtly. "I wish you would take a leaf out of her book. Now, for Heaven's sake, when you go into that room yonder, Mrs. Sotheran, don't be emotional. There's only brandy enough for one, and Mrs. Paton herself is far from well. You've heard that, of course. Well, there's not much the matter at present, but there may be a good deal; and if you excite her you'll *kill* her; so there. It sounds brutal," soliloquized Mr. Flay as he trotted down-stairs; "but it's no use speaking to that poor lady in a crisis such as this like a gentleman and a Christian. There are some women who must be always treated as if for hysterics."

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD FRIENDS.

MR. FLAY had, in truth, been cruel only to be kind; like the too impassioned householder, in whose case the burglars had to resort to "crowbars and other sedatives," it was necessary to frighten Mrs. Sotheran very much to keep her quiet. In moments of excitement it was next to impossible for her to control her feelings; she could not be pacified; it was necessary to terrify her; and in this Mr. Flay had succeeded. She entered Mrs. Paton's room with her heart in her mouth, but with a composed countenance, and a resolute determination to postpone the display of her feelings till she got home. Mrs. Paton, too, had her own reasons for assuming an appearance of equanimity. She had nerved herself, as it were, to avoid the very semblance of having "nerves;" so that, of the three persons present in the interview that followed, Mary herself was the one who showed the most emotion and felt the least. Her position was, nevertheless, one of consid-

erable embarrassment. She had not seen Mrs. Sotheran, it will be remembered, since she had learned from her the secret of her birth, and on her part had communicated to her the reasons for her departure from Mrs. Beckett's; neither of which matters could be discussed, of course, in the presence of a third person.

Mrs. Paton's indisposition, however, which was the immediate cause of the visitor's presence, naturally formed the first topic of conversation; and it was a great relief to Mary that after one affectionate embrace, in which all that a hug could convey was signified, Mrs. Sotheran confined her attentions to the lady of the house. The latter was on the sofa; and her preliminary inquiries having been put, the visitor took her seat beside her and conversed with her in a low tone, while Mary placed herself, with a book, at the window. Even if she had looked up from it, which she carefully forbore to do, and had caught the two women's faces fixed on her with an absorbing interest, mingled, in the case of the elder, with a certain "fearful joy," she would have been slow to believe that she herself formed the subject of their talk. Yet it was so.

"Do you think I have done wisely, Lily?"

"I think you have done well," replied the other, evasively. "It was surely the right and natural thing to do; I cannot think how any one could blame you."

Mrs. Paton shook her head. "Oh, yes, I should be blamed, Lily. He would never, never forgive me if he knew of it. I have risked all that, and more, I know. It was simply that the temptation was irresistible."

"You withstood it for twenty years," murmured the other; then, as if reflecting that her words involved a reproof, or at least a suggestion of imprudence, she added, "He would surely consider that."

"No, he would not; he would admit neither excuse nor palliation, Lily. Detection would be simple ruin."

"But how is it possible he should detect it? I am the sole person besides yourself who is the depositary of the secret."

"Yes, and your face reveals it. It was my husband saying that which made my heart stop."

“What? *what?*” If you have seen a hare start up in her form when she first hears the cry of the hounds, you will know what the speaker looked like.

“Of course he was not alluding to *her*,” put in Mrs. Paton, with a glance at the unconscious girl; “I should not have been alive to tell it had he done that. . He was speaking generally about your secretive, frightened ways, and said you always reminded him of the woman who learned the Freemasons’ secret by accident, and could never get it off her mind.”

“It’s quite true,” sighed Mrs. Sotheran. “That is what I feel as if I looked like.”

“Yes, but it’s very dangerous, Lily, and you mustn’t. Then what do you think Mr. Flay said just now as he was wishing that dear girl good-bye?—‘There is something in your face that I seem to remember.’”

“And so there *is*,” ejaculated Mrs. Sotheran, tremulously; “you see the likeness yourself.”

Mrs. Paton nodded gravely. “Oh yes, oh yes.”

“And your husband? Did it not strike him?”

“Thank Heaven, no. He stared a little hard at her when they first met; but the impression, whatever it was, seemed to fade away from his mind.”

“What moments you have passed, dear friend, since last I saw you,” murmured Mrs. Sotheran, pityingly. “They would have killed me outright.”

“They may kill *me*, Lily; but that will be no great harm.”

“Hush! hush! I can’t bear it; and if I once break down—”

“You speak of ‘moments,’” put in Mrs. Paton, in a passionate whisper. “What are moments, though they are moments of agony, compared with the misery and solitude of twenty years? What I have suffered within the last six hours is as nothing, matched with their peace and joy. I seem to have almost got my darling back again—my long-lost darling.”

“Hush! hush! Yet she is not like him.”

“No; that is true. She is her mother’s living image. I know what you are saying to yourself, Lily; I know what you are thinking of me. You are saying, ‘This

poor woman is all wrong ; she takes comfort from what should be her shame.”

“No, no ; I was not thinking that myself—indeed I was not—but only what the world would say.”

“The world ! Do you mean the people under this roof ?” She paused, with a gesture of ineffable contempt. “Well, well, let us say the people outside it. What have they to do with me and my miseries ? What have I to do with the world—a worn and weary old woman, near to death by nature’s law and liable to be cut off at any moment by a fatal disease ? I am dead to life already. For years I have only asked for liberty to dream of the unreturning past, and that has been denied me. My heart is with my only son in his unknown grave. My hope is in God alone, and you talk to me of the world !”

“Pray, pray calm yourself, my dear old friend,” pleaded the other. “Things are not quite so bad as you describe. You have said yourself that you have found some comfort.”

“Yes, I have ; for *she* stands there. But I have not found it ; I have filched it. It is a stolen pleasure. I cannot boast of it ; I cannot enjoy it except in secret ; and the penalty of discovery is death. Yes, death ; for I could never survive his wrath.”

“It was his own fault,” returned Mrs. Sotheran, after a long pause. “It was he who took you up to town.”

“It was ; and for what reason I cannot guess. Even then, perhaps, I should not have seen her—certainly I should not have won her for myself—but for the accident of her leaving Mrs. Beckett. To hear of her being alone in London, making her own living, or failing to make it, and I within a few streets of her—no, Lily, it was irresistible.”

“Poor soul ! poor soul !”

“Yes, I do not think God will blame me, whatever man may do. On the contrary, that things should have so fallen out seems to show to me that it was his will that I should have her with me.”

“It is so difficult to tell,” hesitated the other. “People talk of the finger of Providence ; but one does not know which way it points.”

"True, true. Oh, terrible world, so full of trouble and doubt, how gladly shall I quit you!"

"For a better, my dear friend, for a better."

"Perhaps. But not if my boy is not there. Think of that, Lily. Heaven without one's only son! *Your* boys are gone there, but my boy may not have gone. Mr. Flay was just saying how much more I had to be thankful for than you had. How little he knew! I think I am the most miserable of all womankind!"

Mrs. Sotheran shook her head. "Many a woman thinks that, dear. It is sometimes hard to believe that we are intended to be happy. *You* have not lost your husband."

"True; and I love him. I wish I could say, with the love that casts out fear. Yes, there is Beryl."

"Consider, too," continued the other, "though wealth has no attraction for you, it is sad to be poor: to live alone, unnoticed or despised; to feel so weary, and still to have to work; to plan and plot to make both ends meet."

"You could have had hundreds—thousands, Lily; Beryl is generosity itself; one word of mine could get them still."

"I know it; it must never be spoken. It would be said that I was bribed to silence. Moreover, there is one thing worse than poverty, the bread of dependence. Above all, I could never share it with my boy."

"Ah, your boy. Do not measure your woes with mine when you can still speak of him. Ah, me, what some women can boast of—a good son!"

"You are right, dear, you are right, and I am wrong; forgive me."

There was a long pause, during which the two women—victor and vanquished, in this struggle for the palm of woe—sat, with their hands locked together, gazing into each other's eyes.

"I saw Charley in London, you know," said the elder, presently; "it was selfish of me not to have spoken of that before. He came to see me at the hotel. He loves her, Lily."

"What! Loves Mary! Oh, no; you are mistaken there. I know, from Mary herself, that there was an-

other, though that is over now, to whom she was attached."

"I am not speaking of Mary; I am speaking of Charley. Do you suppose I can ever be blind *a second time?*"

"But if my Charley really loved her—"

"Oh, I see; you mean he would be invincible. True. It is so long ago that I had forgotten what it is to be a mother."

Here ensued another pause. There were some arguments, or assertions, on Mrs. Paton's part, which, as it seemed to the other, were unanswerable.

"The dear girl will have a difficult part to play here," observed Mrs. Sotheran, presently.

"On the contrary, she will have no part to play; she has only to be natural. It is there, if anywhere, that our safety lies. Should she have the least suspicion of her own identity we should be walking on the brink of a precipice indeed."

"That is too terrible to think upon," observed Mrs. Sotheran, with a shiver: "that she should remain in ignorance I take for granted. What I referred to was the mere difficulties of her position here as your companion and confidante. I am sorry to say that Scarsdale seems already jealous of her."

"I cannot help that," returned Mrs. Paton. "I mean, I cannot think of that when so much worse things are to be apprehended. There is one matter that is greatly in our favor. Beryl has taken to Mary immensely. It almost frightened me to see it, lest he should recognize it for what, perhaps, it was."

"You mean the tie of blood?"

Mrs. Paton nodded gravely. "Why not? The blood which is thicker than water is said to mysteriously assert its claims."

"The more mysteriously the better," returned Mrs. Sotheran, naively. "Only fancy if it should disclose them."

"Yes; that would be ruin. The tie would snap at once. What I hope for, what I count upon, is her winning my husband's affection for her own sake, and on his remaining ignorant of the connection to the last."

"I see. He would then provide for her, no doubt, like any other stranger, which he never would do if he suspected her relationship."

"She is no relation to him whatever," returned Mrs. Paton, bitterly; "she is no relation to any one. She is without name or race; in the eyes of the law a nobody, in that of society a leper."

"To be sure, poor girl; I had forgotten."

"Forgotten? Oh, I wish I could forget it, and, above all, the cause—the cause!"

Mrs. Paton sighed, and covered her face with her hands; yet the shame she would have shut from her view was not an open one; it was buried in the grave. She was thinking of her dead son, and of the wrong which, through her mother, he had done to this innocent girl.

The sins of our fathers, it is well known, are visited upon the children; but it often happens, though it is not so often spoken of, that the sins of our children find us out; and they are harder to bear than our own sins.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HAPPY FAMILY.

IF to live on the best, and at somebody else's expense, is (as in a moment of confidence it was once described to me by a great social philosopher) the highest happiness, the guests at Letcombe Hall ought to have been well satisfied with their position. They had nothing to complain of as to food or drink or lodging; and common civility—for Beryl Paton detested flattery—was the only payment they had to make for it. Moreover, they had unbroken leisure; and as almost all of them were engaged in some scientific or literary pursuit, or had the general amelioration of the human race in charge, this must have been the greatest boon of all. If ever the great question of endowment of research, indeed, has had a chance of settlement, here was the opportunity. What alone interfered with the perfect repose of these gentry was the far-reaching

qualities of their minds, which, not content with the present easy circumstances of their existence, were always fixed on their perpetuation. Even the most irreligious of them were occupied with the idea of what would happen after death—not their own deaths, which would have been a paltry and egotistic matter, unworthy of their attention, but that of their friend and host, Beryl Paton. The question of “Who would be heir?” was the speculation that intruded more or less upon all these philosophers, accompanied by the supplementary inquiry, “Why not myself?”

They were not only conscious of this themselves, but every one else was conscious of it, including even the subject of their calculations. The whole circumstance was as patent as in that admirable anecdote of Miss Kate being saluted by her lover with the beard :

“I saw Esau kissing Kate,
And the fact is we all three saw;
For I saw Esau, he saw me,
And she saw I saw Esau.”

There was no pretence, or, at least, no possibility of concealment, in the matter. Life at Letcombe Hall was a sort of continuous competitive examination, the prize for which was Beryl Paton's favor. The reward would be something enormous; could not, by the nature of things, be long delayed; and would almost certainly fall to one of them. The chances of Mrs. Paton herself were discounted; it was known that she would have a large annuity, but nothing at her absolute disposal. The reason of this was that there were some far-away cousins of Mr. Paton whom, for other reasons, but especially for being his relations, he detested; and if his widow should be “got at” by them—so, I grieve to say, one of the philosophers at the Hall (a metaphysician, too) expressed it—or died without a will, some of his money might revert to them. Practically speaking, the whole of Beryl Paton's wealth would go to strangers; he had said so, and he never broke his word; and surely the stranger within his gates had a better chance of succession than the stranger without them. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that even in

the "happy family," as this little circle of expectant guests had been termed, there existed some little jealousy. The cynical observation respecting the probable unwillingness of the average Englishman to bend his thumb to save the life of some Chinese mandarin unknown has its root in a selfish indifference; but no one at Letcombe Hall could be accused of that. Each would have bent his thumb, and bent his back, to insure the immediate demise of all the others.

And this would have been done from no mean or murderous motive, but on the highest moral grounds. In the first place, each imagined that he was, by his wisdom or aspirations, peculiarly fitted for the possession of great wealth; and, secondly, he was convinced that, of all people under the sun, these others, whom he had such excellent opportunities of knowing down to their boots, were the most likely to make an ill use of it. It is not to be credited that a man like Mr. Marks, the metaphysician, for example, could have cared for money for its own sake. Money was not even dross to him. The famous question, "What is a pound?" in his eyes took too much for granted. His initial inquiry upon that subject would have been, "Is it a pound?" It would have been of no use to show him the coin. He would only have put it in his pocket and walked away with it in a fit of abstraction. A tall, fat man he was, with a placid smile, such as you only see in infants asleep, and with a face of such benevolence that it looked like a petrified blessing. It must be admitted that his philanthropy was not practical; but on that he plumed himself. If any one had knocked him down (and he ran more risks of it than he was aware of) he might have exclaimed, with Hazlitt, "It is no matter; it is only ideas that hurt me."

If, however, Mr. Marks was obviously to be acquitted of material views, how much more innocent of them was Mr. Josiah Nayler. In his eyes metaphysics was a gross and palpable imposture, since, however slight and shadowy were its principles, they were built in some sort upon the pedestal of actuality; and it was against the actual that Mr. Nayler warred. It was his theory that life was looked at through a sort of mental stereoscope, which gave it ap-

parent solidity, but that in reality it had none. The whole universe and its contents, he argued, were phantasmal, and had no real existence; that nothing was as it seemed to be, or had any form or substance; and that even the great majority of mankind were merely impersonations (he called them "presentments"), not composed of flesh and blood at all, but only with the semblance of them, and whose part on the stage of life was to trick and deceive a certain select minority into believing them to be their fellow-creatures. It was, unfortunately, necessary for Mr. Nayler, in order to secure a hearing from the public, to stoop here to a little duplicity; for the select minority which figured in the prospectus of his system was, in his heart of hearts, restricted to himself. His private conviction was that he was the one individual whom the whole forces of nature and of humanity had conspired to hoodwink; that when they were not under his immediate observation, the heavenly bodies, their occupation (of imposing on him) being suspended, collapsed and disappeared; and that when he left a room and closed the door behind him the company vanished into space. As this theory, however, savored somewhat too much of egotism for general acceptance, Mr. Josiah Nayler admitted a few people—the most influential he could get—into his theory, in order, as it were, to make it a going concern. Such was the general selfishness, that he had found the notion of a single personage surrounded with "presentments" by no means attractive to the public (indeed, since, if his theory were true, the public themselves were but presentments, this was hardly to be wondered at), and he had therefore placed the business in the hands, so to speak, of a limited company. All the great and good of his acquaintance were admitted into the sacred circle, and were invited to contemplate the universe with him, like the visitors to a panorama, who, the only living beings in the place, assemble on the platform and listen to the showman as he holds forth upon the objects on the canvas. I am sorry to say that Mr. Marks (possibly because he had objected to pay his entrance-money to the panorama, viz., the price of Mr. Nayler's work upon "Presentments") was not upon the platform; and, indeed, when these two great

men spoke of one another, they used language that would have been frightful if it had not been unintelligible. Ideas did not hurt Mr. Nayler as they hurt Mr. Marks. His immense height and excessive thinness might well have preserved him from all assailants; but as his enemies were mere presentments, their ideas were, necessarily, but the shadows of ideas, which he regarded with a sublime indifference.

Next, but after these two gentlemen, I place Professor Porson Parks, the archæologist, not that he was inferior to them in learning, far from it—he was a scholar of such profundity that information was only to be extracted from him like water from a draw-well, you had to wait for the windlass—but because their views were already before the public in print while his were still in embryo. He was a man essentially of MSS., the wonder of a coterie, the boast of a select circle of bookworms, the pride of the Great Unpublished (and unpublishable), and, but for the assistance of Mr. Beryl Paton, would probably have remained forever in that chrysalis state. Thanks to him, however, the first chapters of “Prehistoric England” were now passing through the press at the rate of a glacier, and Mr. Porson Parks was “giving his proofs” (very literally) to whomsoever he could persuade to read them. It is possible, though the gate of Beryl Paton’s admiration was shut against no branch of human industry or intelligence, that archæology alone would hardly have made so respectable a niche for itself in that gentleman’s regards; but Mr. Porson Parks had another string to his bow in the person of his sister Adela, whose championship of woman’s rights had a strong claim upon Mr. Paton’s sympathy. Her devotion to the great cause was disinterested, since she was upwards of sixty years of age, and could hardly hope, unless the compulsory marriage of all bachelors was voted “urgent,” to reap much advantage from its success.

If it be true that a woman is as old as she looks, Miss Parks, indeed, was a hundred; nor did she make the slightest attempt to mitigate the ravages of time. She even used her age as an argument for doing everything she pleased, or omitting to do what was disagreeable—a course of conduct, so far as my experience goes, absolutely un-

paralleled among the fair sex. When Mr. Nayler would have presented her with a copy of his treatise on "Presentments" she flatly declined it, upon the ground that she was too old to read new books, and rejected Mr. Marks's exhaustive work upon the "Under Soul," with the observation that metaphysics was arguing in a circle; and though she had one leg in the grave she was not going round and round it with the other to please anybody: from which it may be guessed that this excellent old lady, however highly principled and well-intentioned, was in her manner brusque.

In this last respect Mrs. Welbeck, another lady inmate of the Paton establishment, was her antithesis. She had no particular mission, nor even an aspiration, except that she should never again set eyes upon her husband, but she was mild, inoffensive, and conciliatory. It must be acknowledged that she had not Miss Parks's mental gifts, but she was young, and rather good-looking—attributes which in the female sex outweigh, alas, with some men, the noblest yearnings after perfectibility, and the most marvelous capabilities for talking three hours on end on the same subject. Her claim upon her host was simply that she had been unfortunate and ill-used; she had married in haste, and repented, not at leisure, but with equal rapidity; and it was understood that immunity from her husband's attentions had been purchased at Mr. Paton's expense. It was curious, considering the mixed character of his guests, and very significant of the estimation in which his character was held, that no one was so foolish—though many might have been base enough—to attribute this act of charity to any but the true one, namely, the purest benevolence. Where they erred was in imagining that Beryl Paton could have thus placed himself in the hands of this lady's husband to be squeezed like a wet sponge. He had the eccentricity and philanthropy of a Don Quixote, but without his folly, and redressed grievances with a far stronger hand. The truth was, he had made it his business to discover that Mr. Welbeck had done worse things—or things, at least, that the law frowns more severely upon—than beating his wife, and was kept at arm's-length, and farther, from his injured spouse, by

the fear of punishment rather than by the sense of advantage. Mrs. Welbeck had plenty of money of her own—a circumstance absolutely phenomenal with an inmate of Letcombe Hall; but even had this not been the case, it is doubtful whether she could have regarded Mr. Paton's demise with eyes that had any speculation in them. She was simple to a fault—"to the verge of idiocy," Miss Parks, I regret to say, expressed it—and so easily satisfied that she reminded one of that pattern guest who only asked of his host that the bacon at breakfast might be streaky, and that the servants should be instructed to hang up his great-coat by the loop.

Another remarkable member of the "happy family" was Mr. Hindon, commonly called, from the sweetness of his disposition and the accommodating nature of his opinions, the "Dove." Strange to say, it was neither genius nor misfortune which had recommended him to Mr. Beryl Paton, and procured him an asylum which bade fair to be lifelong at Letcombe Hall, but generosity of character. On a certain occasion in Paris Mr. Paton had got himself into a very serious quandary through mistaken benevolence; he had adopted a friendless desperado, who took advantage of his intimacy with the eccentric millionaire—who had the *entrée* everywhere—to make an attempt on the imperial regalia; and Mr. Louis Hindon had proffered such services as, had they been put into effect, might indeed have earned the other's undying gratitude. As it happened, the necessity for the self-sacrifice had not arisen, but by Beryl Paton the will was taken for the deed. The whole behavior and conversation of Mr. Hindon was, indeed, in accordance with his patron's view of him. A more good-natured, generous, enthusiastic creature it would have been difficult to find—so far as professed willingness and the expression of noble thought went; but the detractors of Mr. Hindon—and they were many—affirmed that at words they stuck; that he would not have lifted a finger to help his mother (not that he had ever done it; they instanced it as a supposititious case) unless he had seen some advantage to himself in it; and that as to that offer of his to Mr. Paton, he had never had the remotest intention of putting it into practice, and had only made it

out of his passionate and irresistible love of lying. This was hard upon Mr. Hindon, and a poor return for his endeavors to make himself agreeable to everybody, which, if made (as was alleged) at the sacrifice of truth and self-respect, ought surely to have been all the more highly estimated. He did his best to sympathize with the metaphysical jargon of Mr. Marks; he made the most strenuous efforts to persuade Mr. Nayler (whose system, unfortunately, he did not at once completely grasp), first, that he was a presentment, and, secondly, that he was not; and he placed his services as an amanuensis unreservedly at the disposal of Mr. Porson Parks, though not, it was averred, until he had discovered that that gentleman held his MSS. so sacred that no one but his sister Adela was deemed worthy to dust them with a feather brush.

One other member of the "happy family" alone remains to be spoken of; the most important, if not the most remarkable, of all—Dr. Bilde, Mr. Paton's own physician. Between the others and their host, as we have shown, there existed some hold upon his sympathy, or some claim to his favor, which it was the object of each to render more close and firm; but with Dr. Bilde he was absolutely antagonistic. Not an opinion the doctor expressed, nay, scarcely a sentence he uttered, was in unison with his patron's ideas. Yet his position at Letcombe Hall was more assured than that of any other person. The reason of this was that his knowledge of Mr. Paton's constitution, and the skill with which he treated it, made him indispensable to him, while, on the other hand, he had nothing to gain from Mr. Paton's decease. That gentleman had made a codicil to his will, or, rather, to all his wills (for he had made a dozen), in which a sum was left to his doctor which increased in arithmetical progression with every year that he should remain his medical attendant; and a very pretty plan it is of getting, if not the "best advice," at all events the best of which a scientific legatee is capable.

Dr. Bilde had been a man of some eminence in his profession, and had distinguished himself in various anatomical investigations, which, if not of much moment, he at least claimed to be discoveries; but what had interfered

with his advancement, and had put popularity out of the question, was his harshness of demeanor, insolence of manner, and a most unparalleled capacity for quarrels.

A disruption with his hospital, with every member of whose staff, from the senior surgeon to the youngest dresser, he had impartially fallen out, had originally caused Mr. Paton's attention to be drawn to him. He thought him an ill-used man; and for a little while—during which he had established his professional reputation with him by his treatment of a serious malady to which Mr. Paton was subject—had adhered to that opinion. The doctor, with his high, bald forehead, imperturbability of feature, and keen but emotionless expression, looked the scientific martyr—careless for self, but zealous for principle—to the life. He never inveighed against his opponents unless tempted to do so by hearing others defend them, nor attacked their theories unless his own were called into question. On the other hand, when these opportunities did occur they were taken advantage of to the uttermost. On the first occasion of his “breaking out” in this manner—it was a tremendous philippic against the anti-vivisectionists, with whom, it is unnecessary to say, Beryl Paton sympathized very warmly—his patron and patient, stroking soothingly his long, white beard in a manner peculiar to him on the rare occasions when he deemed it necessary to express emotion, observed gravely, “Ah! *now* I know why they turned you out of St. Galen's Hospital.”

The doctor turned on him like a tiger.

“Pooh! pooh!” continued the other, contemptuously, “I could strangle you before you got your lancet out; and besides, remember the codicil.”

Possibly these arguments had some effect upon Dr. Bilde, though they were far from calming him. “You are as ignorant, sir, as you are insolent,” he replied; “you know nothing at all either of the subject in question or of me.”

“Quite true, doctor; so far I owe you an apology; and if I say you are the most opinionated, ill-tempered, and impracticable of human beings, you must understand that I do not do so of my own knowledge (save from what I have learned of you just now), but merely echo the opin-

ion of everybody who has ever come across you. I am now going to take some of your excellent medicine, which I really believe is doing me good. When we meet next I hope to find you in better humor."

Even a scientific martyr, with the temper of one "possessed," is not absolutely blind to his own interests, and this reproof the doctor contrived to swallow. Without subordinating his own opinions to that of his patron, Dr. Bilde for the future abstained from thrusting them down his throat; at the same time he did not hesitate, even in his presence, to perform that operation upon others, nor did he give himself the least trouble to silver the pills. Somehow or other, Beryl Paton endured him. Perhaps he used with himself that common but fallacious argument, "If this man is not honest, what *is* he?" or perhaps, just as a physician will do his best for a patient, whether he be bishop or burglar, he thought to himself, "What has a sick man to do with the opinions of his doctor?" There was certainly no love lost between them, but on the other hand it was shrewdly said by some that, wearied of the scented atmosphere of subservience that surrounded him (like Louis XIV. among the tuberoses), it was not impossible that Beryl Paton might, after all, seek shelter in the rude independence of Dr. Bilde, and make that codicil (which was a secret known to all) out of all proportion to the will itself. With this contingency in their minds, as a supplement to the impression produced by his bad manners and overbearing ways, it may be easily imagined that Dr. Bilde was not a popular member of the "happy family." Mrs. Beryl Paton herself, whom, it must be confessed, he took little pains to please, had a perfect horror of him, and when indisposed always employed, as we have seen, the services of the village Esculapius, who had also a history of his own. She used to say, with a fervor which amused her husband, that she would not trust Dr. Bilde with a dog of hers.

"Quite right," Beryl Paton would reply; "the fellow could never resist the temptation of vivisectioning it." But he placed his own constitution unreservedly in his hands, and had certainly no cause to believe his confidence misplaced.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THRUST AND PARRY.

WHEN the heart, in the emotional sense of the word, is hurt, the wound commonly takes long to heal; but when it is physically affected, the contrary, if it heals at all, is the case. The thing is soon over—until the next time. On the morning after her seizure (for by no less serious a term did Mr. Flay describe it, in professional confidence, to Dr. Bilde) Mrs. Beryl Paton made her appearance as usual at the public breakfast-table. This, however, she would probably not have done had it not been for Mary's sake, whose first appearance she was resolved should take place under her wing; and a very considerable flutter in the poultry-yard did the new arrival cause. Miss Gwynne, her predecessor, had been no such chicken; though treated by her patrons with their usual kindness, she had never won their affections, nor emerged, by a single step, from her subordinate position. It had been seen from the first that there was no danger of her competitorship for Mr. Beryl Paton's favor; and, indeed, she had not competed for it; she had concentrated all her small energies on securing Mr. Wells, the Vicar of Letcombe Dottrell; and after long years of pursuit, diversified by frequent checks, during some of which it seemed likely that he would escape her altogether, she caught him. When she departed from the Hall she left no void, nor did any one of those concerned in that great case (always proceeding and watched with exceeding interest by many spectators) of "Who shall be heir?" feel his chances advanced one whit by her withdrawal.

The appearance on the scene of Mary Marvon was quite a different matter, and aroused many secret apprehensions. Her youth, her beauty, and the self-command which she, at least outwardly, exhibited, and which betrayed her acquaintance with the world, were all, it was felt, formida-

ble weapons; but when Mr. Beryl Paton himself rose, contrary to his custom, from his chair to wish Mary good-morning, it was understood to be a danger signal indeed. The "happy family" exchanged secret but significant glances with one another, and in presence of the common enemy almost fancied that they could be allies.

It was quite at the option of the guests at Letcombe Hall to take his or her meals in their own apartment, but if they did condescend to grace the common table with their presence it was necessary they should be punctual; this was the one regulation of the establishment which was enforced with strictness. Beryl Paton had a theory (which has my cordial adhesion) that since people can be always in time in the case of *levees* and drawing-rooms, they can be punctual, if they please, on more private and social occasions. If through any unavoidable accident he was late himself, it was his injunction that he was never to be waited for; and when he did come, always made an apology, like the true gentleman he was, for that breach of good manners.

On this occasion, as may be easily imagined, there was a full attendance. Mary had a place assigned to her at her hostess's right hand, with Mr. Porson Parks for her neighbor on the other side. This gentleman was of small stature, but had so enormous a head that he resembled a comic initial letter; "he bore his weight of learning like a flower," in so far only that the stem was very disproportionate to the blossom, and was, indeed, ungainly both in speech and manner. To Mary, however, he was as courteous and conciliatory as nature permitted him to be. He condescended to speak to her of Cassibelaunus as being a comparatively modern subject, and likely to interest so young a lady, and inquired, with interest, whether she had not been accustomed to spell it with a *b*. There were unmistakable signs, he informed her, of Cassibelaunus having visited that part of the country, and also of its occupation by Agricola (which, in his character of a husbandman, there certainly were), and he was good enough to give her an abstract of the history of Dottrell Knob, the elevation on the downs which had been pointed out to her on her journey of the previous day. As she listened,

or tried to listen, with great patience, Mr. Porson Parks set her down as an intelligent young person, and resolved to recommend her to the protection of Adela.

As a matter of fact, as soon as she found that the last thing Mr. Porson Parks expected was any interruption to his labored eloquence, even in the form of a question, Mary's attention strayed away from these edifying themes to what was going on elsewhere. She noticed that there was little general conversation, but that each, in turn, had his innings in the way of monologue, and left the colloquial wicket very well pleased with his own performance, but without much tumultuous acclaim from the spectators; that he who spoke most, and with least satisfaction to his hearers, was Dr. Bilde, and that the only man who ever agreed with him was Mr. Hindon. "Yes, yes; you may well say that, indeed, doctor;" "Quite true;" and "There you are very right," were sentences he constantly uttered without the least acknowledgment on the doctor's part. His adhesion seemed to be of no more consequence to that gentleman than a bur at the back of his coat. On the other hand, Mr. Hindon would now and then evoke a frown by too extravagant a eulogy, such as "You won't beat that, doctor," or "You never made a more noteworthy observation in your life," which seemed to be deficient in margin.

The appointments of the breakfast-table, which was supplied with an abundance of dainties, were far more splendid than those Mary had been accustomed to in Park Lane; but, even at this early stage of her experience, she could not help contrasting the magnificence of these surroundings with the poverty of talk among the guests. Had Edgar Dornay or even his Uncle Ralph been present, conversation would not thus have languished and been rendered impossible. It was likely enough that every member of the present company had better brains, and had even used them to more practical effect, than either of those two gentlemen, but in a social point of view they were inferior to them, and, in fact, failures. This arose from the circumstance that, in forming his menagerie, Mr. Beryl Paton had, from the nature of the case, selected lions only (with the solitary exception of Mr. Hindon,

who was their jackal), each of whom wished to have his roar to himself, unanswered save by the echoes. Beryl Paton alone put in a word now and then, which had the effect of a spur upon the various speakers, who, like country actors in the presence of a London manager, displayed their abilities for his benefit only, though with an eye to "benefits" of their own to come. When the ladies spoke, however, they were compelled, in common civility, to throw a word or two to their hostess.

After a panegyric upon female physicians, for example, in which Miss Parks contrived to describe a charlatan in terms which fitted very neatly with the characteristics of Dr. Bilde, she concluded with the remark that during her customary walk before breakfast she had met with Mr. Flay, who had given her, she was glad to say, a cheerful account of Mrs. Paton's state of health. That lady herself was content to acknowledge this attention with a courteous inclination of her head and a gracious smile, but Dr. Bilde took up the remark as if it had been a gauntlet.

"Opinion," he observed, "and especially scientific opinion, was only valuable in proportion to the wisdom of the person who uttered it."

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," said Beryl Paton, dryly; "my wife has good reason to think highly of Flay's professional skill."

Dr. Bilde shut his eyes, smiled, and shrugged his shoulders in a manner which showed that contempt could be expressed without utterance, in three different ways.

"He is, no doubt," he said, "a very excellent lady's doctor."

"By which I suppose you mean," snapped out Miss Parks, "that he knows how to behave himself like a gentleman; for my part, I don't see why manners should not be taught to every medical man."

Each looked down at his plate and smiled, except the host, who laughed outright. I am afraid that he took some pleasure in the groans and roars of his lions.

"You must really forgive me, my dear sir," said Dr. Bilde, ignoring his female antagonist altogether; "but as I am speaking of a member of my own calling, I am justified in doing so with some authority. The gentleman in

question had at one time, it is true, a position of his own in London—he was at Guy's, if I remember right—but it was forfeited by an act which, if not of criminal negligence (which, indeed, was never suggested), showed an amount of professional carelessness quite inconsistent with the eulogy you have just pronounced upon him."

"He had a son who worked with him, had he not?" inquired Mr. Paton, parenthetically.

"Yes, he was his partner; but, when left alone, his son ruined the business."

"Then he ruined it twice over," said Mr. Paton, dryly. "The fact is, Dr. Bilde—as I happen to know for certain—that the act of professional misconduct of which you speak was not committed by Mr. Flay at all, but by his son. In order to save him from disgrace, his father sacrificed himself, and took the blame upon his own shoulders."

"What a good, brave man Mr. Flay must be!" whispered Mary to her hostess.

"Yes, my dear—hush."

"I have learned, however, this morning, for the first time," continued Mr. Paton, harshly, "that his so-called paternal instinct has had the usual reward."

There was a general murmur of adhesion to this remark, amid which Mr. Hindon was heard to say, "A very just observation; my sentiments exactly." As for poor Mrs. Paton, she kept silence, while into her eyes there stole a sadness too deep for tears.

"Speaking of natural instinct," observed Dr. Bilde, in his strident tones, "there is no greater illusion than the inclination felt by the vulgar to place it among the virtues. I once attended a woman *in extremis*, who throughout her illness had obstinately declined all medical aid. Her object (in which she succeeded) was to prevent it being discovered that she had been poisoned by her own son."

"Why didn't *you* tell, when you found it out?" inquired Miss Parks, acidly.

"A very pertinent question," observed Mr. Hindon, approvingly, "neatly put in with the left, as they say in the prize-ring; a body blow."

"The point of the matter, to which it is the object of

all intelligent persons to restrict themselves," continued Dr. Bilde, "is that the young gentleman in question did not evince one spark of gratitude or remorse, and afterwards murdered somebody else."

"Very right—I mean very natural," observed Mr. Hindon, with precipitation. "Human nature all over."

"And a very pretty illustration of the ties of blood," remarked Beryl Paton, grimly.

It was a habit of Dr. Bilde's when, through native obstinacy and dogmatic adhesion to his own opinions, he had angered his patron, to recover his footing with him by flattering his peculiar prejudices; and as to the pain which he thereby inflicted on his hostess it might be said of it, as he frankly remarked of certain torments he had inflicted upon the lower animals in the cause of science, that "it never so much as entered into his mind."

Throughout these narratives and their episodes Mr. Porson Parks had continued his discourse upon Agricola without paying any more regard to them than a lecturer pays to the opening and shutting of his class-room door. His solitary pupil was suddenly recalled to the consciousness of her neglected privileges by the mention of her own name: "So we may consider that matter settled, Miss Marvon, may we?"

"I am not quite sure," said Mary, diplomatically, not having the faintest notion what her learned friend was talking about.

"Well, of course we must obtain Mrs. Paton's permission; but so far as you are concerned I have your promise, remember, to permit me to introduce you to the glories of the Roman Villa."

Mrs. Paton, thus indirectly appealed to, nodded acquiescence with an amused smile. "You shall take my young friend some day, Mr. Parks."

The energies of that learned man, as she well knew, when not occupied with "Prehistoric England," were concentrated on persuading all new-comers to the Hall to visit the Roman Villa in his company. He had the same pleasure in introducing them to it that a country gentleman feels in taking you over his stables—and it lasted even longer.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN MEMORIAM.

EXCEPT at meals, Mary Marvon saw but little of the gentleman guests at the Hall, and was quite ignorant of the interest—an interest very far removed from sympathy—with which most of them regarded her. In a very short time it became evident that she had won the favor of her host, who treated her with far more than the kindness he always showed to those who most stood in need of it. Mrs. Paton regarded this with a satisfaction that was not unmixed with fear: she guessed the reason—or one of the reasons—of her husband's regard for her young *protégée*, and trembled at it.

One day when Mary was sitting as usual with her in the boudoir, she startled her with this inquiry: "Is there any harm, dear Mrs. Paton, in my playing on the organ in the picture-gallery?"

"The organ? yes—I mean, no. Why do you ask that question, my dear?"

"Because, when I was in the gallery this morning I sat down, thinking no harm, at the organ, and tried to play a little. There was an organ at school, and the bigger girls used to practise on it, though not much, and I wanted to see if I had forgotten what little skill I ever had in that way. After I had played a few notes I suddenly heard Mr. Paton's voice close beside me. It startled me very much, and the more so since I was sure, by his tone, that he was displeased."

"Who told you to play that organ?" he inquired.

"No one, sir. I hope I am not doing wrong."

"You are sure nobody told you?" he insisted.

"Certainly not, sir," I answered; "it was only that the fancy took me."

"Just so." Then he smiled, and said very kindly, "You were quite right to give way to it, because you

are one of those who can be trusted to follow your impulses.'”

“And then what happened?” inquired Mrs. Paton, eagerly.

“Well, he told me to go on playing, and of course I did so ; but when I looked up he was gone. Was it not very curious?”

“It seemed so to you, no doubt, Mary,” said Mrs. Paton, taking up her knitting-needles, which had dropped from her hands during this narration, and speaking in a trembling voice ; “but the fact is that that organ has never been touched for twenty years. One at that time very dear to us, who is gone, used at one time to play upon it, and no doubt it awoke some memories which distressed Mr. Paton.”

“I am very, very sorry,” said Mary ; “it was very wrong of me.”

“No, no, Mary, as my husband said, you were quite right. What was the organ there for, you naturally said to yourself, if not to be played upon ? What was it you were playing ?”

“An air from the ‘Stabat Mater.’”

“Good heavens !” ejaculated Mrs. Paton, in a smothered tone ; “why, my dear girl,” she added aloud, “that is enough to distress any one. How could you select such a piece ? You must have been very melancholy yourself, to choose it.”

“If I was, I was very ungrateful,” said Mary, tenderly. “I am sure I have no business to be melancholy with such kind friends as you and Mrs. Sotheran.”

“And my husband ; you must not leave him out,” said the old lady, smiling, “for I am persuaded he has a sincere regard for you. You have told me what he said, Mary ; now, how did he look ?”

“Well, at first he looked angry, but afterwards he seemed pained. From what you have told me, I am sure he was pained. I am so sorry. I will take care never to touch the organ again.”

“Nay, but you must ; now that the ice has once been broken,” continued the old lady, thoughtfully, “it will be better to go on. I have no doubt, however, that he will

“speak to me about it, and then I will let you know. Are you quite sure, Mary, he said, ‘Who told you to play that organ?’ and not ‘Who taught you?’”

“I am quite sure. What seemed to make him angry was the idea of some one else having suggested it. As soon as he found it was all my own doing, he grew calm.”

Later on in the day Mrs. Paton informed her *protégée* that her husband had spoken to her on the subject, and that Mary was to play on the organ whenever she pleased. “From your having chosen such a melancholy air, however, he is under the impression that you are not in good spirits, and he is going to ask some young people to the Hall to enliven it a little.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Paton, that is quite unnecessary; and pray tell him that I am quite happy, and more than contented. No, don’t tell him that,” said Mary, interrupting herself, and flushing a little; “his great kindness makes me forget myself and my position; it is quite monstrous that he should show me such consideration. The idea of his asking people for my sake! I only mean, pray don’t permit him to do anything of the kind.”

“Not permit him!” said Mrs. Paton, smiling gravely. “My dear child, how little you know Beryl Paton! If he has a fancy in his head he will gratify it, though it cost a fortune; and when, as generally happens, it is a fancy to make some one happy, no human power can prevent his indulging in it. I think he means to ask Charley Sotheran down, which will give a double pleasure to his mother and you.”

As she said this, Mrs. Paton smiled with some significance, and looked at her young friend with an interrogating air. If she expected her to change color she was mistaken; it was without the least embarrassment that Mary expressed her opinion that Charley’s coming would be very nice, but so far as her own spirits were concerned, the administration of him as a tonic would be quite superfluous.

“He took a great interest in you, I thought, in London, my dear,” said Mrs. Paton, with an air of tender perplexity; “a very particular interest.”

"He was as kind to me as kind could be," returned Mary, warmly. "There are few people I like better than Charley; but, my dear Mrs. Paton"—here she smiled in her most pleasant fashion—"I can really manage to get on without him."

"Well, now, I almost thought you couldn't," exclaimed the old lady, naïvely; "that was because I heard only one side of the question, I suppose. Not that Charley ever said anything," she added, hastily, noting the girl's quick flush of annoyance, "that hinted of a mutual attachment."

"I am quite sure he did not," said Mary, quietly, "because he is incapable of an untruth."

"Then in that case, my dear, you must be a paragon, for the way in which Charley praised you was monstrous. I could not suppose at the time—because I did not know you, you know—that he was justified by the facts, and therefore set it down to the exaggeration of a lover."

Mary laughed, and was silent. It was not necessary to inform Mrs. Paton that though she had no love for Charley, Charley entertained, or thought that he entertained, a boyish passion for herself. The old lady plied her needles for some time in thoughtful silence, and then observed,

"By-the-bye, Mary—if it does not distress you to speak of it—was there not some one else who at one time was more fortunate in pleasing you than poor Charley? Mrs. Beckett hinted at something of the sort, but I thought it best not to go into it. I should not speak of it now had you not won my old heart, and made me jealous of your having any secret apart from me. Don't tell me if it pains you, darling; but was there not some other young gentleman?"

"Yes, Mrs. Paton, there was," said Mary, frankly. "It does not pain me now to speak of him, but there was a time when it would have pained me very much."

"You loved him, then?"

"I loved what I thought was he," said Mary, obliquely.

"What Mr. Nayler calls a presentment," put in the old lady, smiling gravely. "Yes, his theory is right so far. How often we women are mistaken in the characters of those we love! when we come to know them, how their

images fade from off their pedestals, dissolve, and become quite other men! You, however, found out your error, it seems, in time."

"Yes, yes," sighed Mary; "that is all over." She was quite at home with Mrs. Paton now, and did not at all resent these questionings, which were prompted, as she justly concluded, only by an affectionate regard.

"I had a letter from your hostess of Park Lane this morning," continued the old lady, after a little pause. "She excuses herself for writing during her honeymoon, on the ground that it is her third. What a queer woman she is!"

"Not a bad woman, however," remarked Mary.

"Yet I gathered from Charley that she was capable of a meanness," observed the old lady, significantly.

"At all events she has had the generosity to repent of it," answered Mary.

"I am glad to hear you say so. My opinion of her has always been that, while possessing the weaknesses of our sex in profusion, she has some noble qualities rarely found in it. Then consider her position."

"Quite true," put in Mary, promptly; "her faults belong to it, her virtues are her own."

"I suppose, my dear, if it was necessary, you would not shrink from meeting these people again."

"Mrs. Beckett and her husband? Certainly not," said Mary, cheerfully.

"By-the-bye, she's no longer Mrs. Beckett," remarked the old lady, smiling, "nor even Mrs. Dornay. She has resumed her old title of Lady Orr. She writes to me, as I conclude she has done to all her friends, to inform me of this. Ralph, she says, has no objection; and considering the peculiar circumstances of the case, she returns to her first love, or, at all events, to the use of his name. The 'intermediate' Mr. Beckett is to be ignored altogether."

"Dear me, how strange!" said Mary.

She felt a curious and not unkindly interest in her old friend of Park Lane which a few weeks ago it would have seemed impossible for her to have entertained. The power of time, like that of the ocean wave, is inconceivable until we have experienced it. "I am trying to think,"

said a statesman of our own day who was well acquainted with this fact, as he sat with a certain woful letter in his hand, "how I shall feel about this six months hence." If he could have so far projected himself into the future, he knew that his trouble would be overpassed.

The resentment which Mary had once felt against Mrs. Beckett no longer existed. She could in imagination replace herself in her old chamber in Park Lane, with every picture and ornament about her as of old; but the feelings which had overpowered her there after that last interview with the widow had disappeared like last winter's snow. What becomes of all the love and hate, the delight and fury, the hopes and fears of us poor mortals, which kindle our hearts, without consuming them, as though they were the fuel of a gas fire?

On the other hand, there are some things that are never forgotten.

In the room occupied by Mary Marvon there was a large chest ornamented with scrolls of brasswork, etc., and looking as though it contained some collection of curiosities, but always kept locked. It did not inconvenience the tenant of the apartment, which, like all the guest rooms at the Hall, was of considerable size, each one also communicating with a private sitting-room, so that every one had a home of his own. When Mary had reached that point of familiarity with the hostess where innocent curiosity ceases to be impertinence, and the repression of it does wrong to friendship by seeming to mistrust it, Mary asked Mrs. Paton what this chest contained.

"Relics, my dear," she answered, gravely; "they should be in my room by rights, and not in yours."

Then she sighed heavily and turned away, in a manner that forbade further questions.

That same night, when Mary chanced to be sitting up late in her room, she was surprised to hear her door softly open, and Mrs. Paton come in. She had no candle, which, though their rooms were contiguous, seemed strange, since she could hardly have expected at that time of night to find a light in her young friend's room. Mary started up; but though Mrs. Paton's eyes were apparently wide open and fixed upon her, she took no notice of her presence.

She had a key in her hand, and, going straight to the chest, unlocked it ; then, throwing back the lid, she proceeded to regard the contents with a look of unutterable woe.

For the moment Mary imagined that the poor lady had taken leave of her senses ; but this she soon found was not the case, they were only in abeyance. Mrs. Paton was walking in her sleep. Marvellous condition of the human mind, wherein we move and think and have our being in an unreal world ! Not only our senses, but in a manner our very soul, has fled from us, since, being unconscious, we are unaccountable for what we do even to God himself. There is always something weird in watching persons in this condition ; but what is strange, the dearer and nearer they are to us the more “uncanny” is the exhibition ; the more nearly they are bound to us the more mysterious appears this spiritual separation between ourselves and them.

There was a table beside the chest, and upon it, like one who was used to the matter (as, indeed, she was), the sleeper arranged what she took out of this sacred receptacle ; but every object she first handled reverently, pressed to her heart, and shed over it abundant tears, yet all in an awful silence. First, there were some child’s playthings, battered and broken, and a pair of little shoes ; then, some torn picture-books, and a whip with a whistle—the relics, as it was plain, of infancy. Then came other books, dog-eared and soiled, but each of them carefully wrapped up, as though they had been jewels, in tissue-paper ; next, a clasp-knife with many blades, and then a letter. This she opened with great care and smoothed out the folds, which bore token of age and use.

Who of us do not possess similar treasures—their hiding-place known to ourselves alone, their contents precious only to our own eyes !

This “dead leaf that kept its green” was but a boy’s epistle, written in large, round text, and telling, no doubt, some dull, uninteresting news from the schoolroom or the playground ; but if it had been a dead lover’s note she who held it could not have exhibited more distress and emotion. She did not read it—perhaps she could not—

but that mattered little, since she had every syllable of it by heart, but fondled and caressed it as if it had been a dove or a dormouse.

Mary's position was a most embarrassing one ; it pained her to be the witness of this sacred emotion, which was certainly not intended for her eyes, yet she feared the consequences of awakening the sleeper. There was nothing for it but to remain quite still : if she could have averted her eyes from the scene before her she would have done so, but an irresistible fascination compelled her attention. The contents of the chest resembled the strata in a geological cabinet ; they were arranged in chronological order, but the last epoch, alas, that of manhood, was of short duration. It was clear, from the nature of the relics, that the departed had died young. There was nothing that spoke of old age, or even of maturity. A light walking-cane, such as none but a young man would have carried ; a picture or two of the kind which takes the fancy of undergraduates ; a cigar-case, worked by some feminine hand ; and, again, more letters. These last were tied up with black ribbon ; and Mrs. Paton did not undo them, but held them in her hand at a little distance from her, apparently lost in woful thoughts ; doubtless the color of their fastening betokened their contents, and she had not the heart to read them.

From the first, Mary had understood that these things were all that was left to Mrs. Paton of her dead boy. She guessed, too, why they were not, as the other had said, where they by rights should be, in her hostess's own room. Their presence there would have aroused the anger of her husband, implacable as ever against her graceless son. It was probably considered a crime in his unhappy mother even to retain them, much more to mourn over them ; but Mary's mention of the chest that day had perhaps recalled them to the poor lady's mind, and caused this unconscious visit. It was an unspeakable relief to the girl when her hostess had come to the end of these memorials, and quietly proceeded to replace every article in the place from which she had taken them. Then she gently closed the chest and locked it, and with a sigh that seemed to come from her very soul, and shaking her head in a slow

and pitiful manner, left the room as silently as she had entered it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SUITORS.

As to that painful scene in her own chamber, of which Mary had been an involuntary spectator, it is needless to say that she said nothing to any one; but the remembrance of it drew her still nearer to her hostess, as to one who stood in sore need of loving sympathy. Mrs. Paton, on her part, though unconscious of its motive, was quick to see this growing tenderness, and reciprocated it with a demonstrativeness which, under the circumstances, was scarcely prudent, and which, for one thing, made Mrs. Scarsdale Mary's enemy. Mrs. Paton, as may be imagined, was by no means one of those high-placed, heartless women to whom the feelings of those beneath them are subject of profound indifference, but her affection for Mary flowed in so deep and quick a stream that it carried her away with it, and she thought little of its effect on those about her.

Moreover, Scarsdale, though she had long been Mrs. Paton's own maid, had never enjoyed her confidence, and therefore, perhaps, her mistress did not sufficiently credit her with the resentment with which Mary's advancement and her own effacement inspired her. She was, in fact, consumed with jealousy. That quiet "You may go now, Scarsdale," with which Mrs. Paton dismissed her every evening, while Mary remained in her room for a private talk, struck through the tight stays of the waiting-woman into her very soul. What was poison to her wound, she found herself for a long time without sympathizers. Her fellow-servants, with whom she was no great favorite, had not only nothing to complain of Miss Marvon, but had all a good word for her. Her gentle manners and her carefulness to avoid giving trouble made her popular with them; and whenever they had a favor to ask of their mistress they soon found that there was no surer way of ob-

taining it than through her new "companion." Mary knew nothing of the great systems of philosophy, but she unconsciously did her best to "increase the sum of human happiness," which—with the exception of its supplement, the "decrease of human misery"—is perhaps to be recommended above all others for general wear. She especially interested herself in Japhet Marcom, Mr. Paton's deaf-and-dumb attendant, whose sign-language she learned with great rapidity, and who repaid her for her kindly notice of him with an attachment only second to that which he evinced for his master. Even to Scarsdale herself she was as courteous, and would have been as kind, as to the rest; but that lady resented her civilities as though they had been some odious form of patronage, and replied to them in a manner that not only suggested ice, but rough ice. From her fellow-servants, as I have said, she received no encouragement in this behavior; but her complaints reached the ears of others in a higher sphere, and received what she conceived to be their meed of sympathy, but which was in fact a by no means disinterested condolence. None of the "happy family" grudged Mary Marvon her favor with Mrs. Paton. That lady was, as it were, shunted off the main line of their calculations, and could neither assist nor obstruct them in reaching the terminus of their hopes. But Mary's obviously rapid advancement in the good graces of their host filled them with distrust and consternation.

She had, indeed, become so dangerous in the eyes of some of them as to suggest conciliation, and something more. Under ordinary circumstances, indeed, it may not have seemed unnatural that, being so young and comely, Mary should inspire admiration even in those who deemed her interests antagonistic to their own; but in the case of a great metaphysician like Mr. Marks, or of a transcendentalist such as Mr. Nayler, nothing so gross and vulgar was to be looked for. The personal attentions which they condescended to pay to her must be considered, not as the evidence of any human weakness within, but as a method of self-defence—a desperate remedy. A keen observer—who must, however, have had exceptional opportunities of observing them, for their demonstrations were very pru-

dent—would nevertheless have concluded that they were making love to her; and this was a conviction that, in course of time, notwithstanding she knew that they were such professed philosophers, was borne in upon Mary herself. Of course she was mistaken, as indeed it proved; but in the meantime their conduct was certainly, to say the least of it, suggestive.

In the first place, Mr. Marks, when alone with Mary, would voluntarily divorce himself from his professed passion, metaphysics, and converse, after an intermediate stage or two, like an ordinary mortal. He confessed to her that in her presence he forgot his Kant—by which he was charitably understood to mean his favorite author—and was tempted to exchange his system for one more spiritual, such as that which speculates upon how many angels can dance upon a pin's point; and then again he would sigh as if struck by an afterthought, and protest that there was only one angel for whom he cared a pin, and that she was in his immediate vicinity. This was not his first day's work, we may be sure, or his second, but this is what it came to. He gave her to understand that hitherto, for all his learning, he had been as a blind man until her presence had opened his eyes—a statement which caused poor Mary (who thought him mad) to open *her* eyes to their extreme limit. "Yes," he said, with an air of profound conviction, "until I saw you, Miss Marvon, the revelation of the beautiful had not been vouchsafed to me, and it transcends all expectation. The effect of it, as you yourself cannot have failed to observe, is very considerable, even in the lowest types of humanity" (here he glanced significantly at Mr. Naylor, who was looking such daggers of jealousy at him as, had he not been a mere presentment, must have pierced him through and through); "you may judge, therefore, how it thrills the soul of one who knows how to think and feel."

It was impossible to reply to such rhetoric, and Mary used to nod from time to time, thereby unconsciously giving him great encouragement, and murmur to herself by way of comfort, "After all, he is quite harmless." But, as time went on, Mr. Marks grew so much bolder and plainer, even to the dropping hints of what a pleasant

place Letcombe Hall would be for them to live in should Mr. Beryl Paton have the good sense to leave it to one or other of them, how likely it was that he would do so, and how expedient it was for both of them to co-operate to that end, that Mary had at last to put her foot down and crush these very unwelcome speculations. And then it was that she was given to understand that Mr. Marks had all along been talking metaphysics, or, in other words, had not really meant anything he said.

Mary's experience with Mr. Josiah Nayler was slightly different. That gentleman had not the sublime courage, or, as Mr. Marks's enemies did not scruple to term it, the consummate impudence, of his rival, and made his advances with more caution. Conscious of his backwardness in this respect, he presently informed Mary, with every sign of a sincere remorse, that it had arisen from a doubt in his own mind as to the reality of her existence. There was no test, as he explained to her, by which you could be certain to detect presentments; and the fact of her appearance in so angelic a garb (here he bowed his long body in such a manner as to suggest a note of admiration becoming, by evolution, one of interrogation), so far from satisfying him on this point, had only rendered him the more suspicious. An evil "presentment" revealed itself at once (poor Mary, who knew nothing of his theory, thought he meant a presentiment, and, eagerly snatching at this straw by way of intelligibility, nodded adhesion); but a good, and especially a beautiful, presentment, had to be examined with caution. He had, however, given his best attention to her, and was convinced—here he gently took her hand and pressed it tenderly—that she was as palpable as she was pure.

With her strong sense of humor, it was difficult for Mary to keep her countenance; but the remembrance of Charles Sotheran's remark that the inmates of Letcombe Hall gave it a very strong resemblance to a private madhouse stood her, as in Mr. Marks's case, in good stead. She felt a pity for Mr. Josiah Nayler which made her bear with him with a patience that would have been otherwise impossible, or even culpable. There was a method, however, even in Mr. Nayler's madness; and the time came when

he, too, ventured delicately to hint that since two humans, male and female—the one the type of thought and the other of comeliness—had had the extraordinary good-fortune to make one another's acquaintance, it would be madness indeed, in a world of presentments, not to unite themselves together; not, indeed, for their own benefit (for such an idea was unworthy of them), but for the advantage, and possibly even for the preservation, of the human race.

To this Mary quietly replied that if ever she married it would not be upon general principles, but from attachment to some particular individual.

"But suppose," exclaimed Mr. Nayler, "that you should take a fancy to a presentment?"

"I should prefer a presentment whom I fancied," was her audacious rejoinder, "to ever so real a person for whom I had neither fancy nor respect."

An observation which, indignant at his philosophic mode of courtship (which she mistook for impertinence), she accompanied with such a look of scorn that he could hardly be in doubt of its personal application.

Then, perceiving all hope of alliance was over, Mr. Josiah Nayler descended from the heights of philosophy and gave battle on the level plain of practical common-sense.

"It is clear to me, young lady," he said, with an angry flush on his face, "that you have altogether mistaken my meaning. It is unnecessary to make any future allusion to the matter. If, under the delusion that I have made you an offer of marriage, you should think fit to communicate the circumstance to Mrs. Beryl Paton, I give you fair warning that I shall deny it."

Mary's unfortunate mistake with respect to these students of philosophy—for it cannot be conceived that two persons who had devoted themselves to that special study should not know their own minds—not only cost her their friendship, but made them her irreconcilable enemies.

As to Dr. Bilde, he had despised her from the first; her gentleness and sympathy were attributes that at once stamped her, in his opinion, as a fool, while the indignation which his sentiments occasionally compelled her to express offended him.

Against Mr. Hindon she had been forearmed and fore-

warned. On the very next day after her arrival, Mrs. Welbeck, finding herself next to Mary at tea in the drawing-room, became extremely confidential, and narrated to her (as her custom was whenever she could find a listener) the whole woful story of her married life.

"If you will take my advice, my dear young lady," she concluded, "you will never place your happiness in the hands of faithless Man. By-the-bye," she added, with no more privacy than was involved by holding up a very thin piece of bread and butter between herself and the rest of the company, like a fan, "has Mr. Hindon proposed to you yet? Well, he *will*," she continued, as Mary made a gesture of alarmed negation. "I believe he has proposed even to Miss Parks."

"What is that you are saying, Mrs. Welbeck?" inquired the maiden thus alluded to, in quick, sharp tones.

"I am warning Miss Marvon against faithless Man."

"But, my dear Mrs. Welbeck," interposed Mrs. Paton, with some seriousness, for she did not approve of that lady's confidences, especially when addressed to Mary, "you must not traduce the whole sex on account of the behavior of individuals."

"They are all alike," urged Mrs. Welbeck, confidently.

"I am sure Professor Parks was never a Don Giovanni," said Mrs. Paton.

"And I would ask you, Mrs. Welbeck," said Adela, wishing to repay her hostess for her compliment to her brother, "has not Mr. Beryl Paton led a monogamous life?"

"I don't impute it to him," returned Mrs. Welbeck, to whom long words were not so familiar as to her interlocutor, the ornament of many platforms; "if he has, let us hope it is all over now.—Ahem!"

This warning cry announced the advent of the gentlemen, and among them Mr. Hindon, who, as it so happened, seated himself next to Mary.

"Now mark my words, he is going to do it," whispered Mrs. Welbeck in Mary's ear, as she left her side to go to the piano, on which she was an accomplished performer. And before the second tune was played Mr. Hindon did do it.

He was as confidential as Mrs. Welbeck had been, and more so, for he had an imagination to work with. He spoke of first love as a sacred mystery, and then proceeded to disclose it. He had painted it as many times as Haydon painted his picture of Napoleon, and was thoroughly at home with his subject. From the general he slid into the particular, and, scarcely knowing how it happened, Mary found herself in full possession of the facts of Mr. Hindon's age and ancestry, and of the figures of his income. If she had felt any interest in the matter, she would have been surprised to find him so young, and especially so rich. It seemed so strange, indeed, that he should be content to live as Mr. Paton's guest when he might have had a Letcombe Hall of his own, that Mary dropped a remark to that effect.

"True," he said, "but solitude is intolerable to me; and until to-day" (here his voice sank so low with excess of feeling, or because he feared to be overheard, that it grew almost inarticulate), "nay, until this hour, I had never seen the being—"

"Since you have, it seems, monopolized Miss Marvon, Mr. Hindon," here again put in Mrs. Paton, who had doubtless a shrewd suspicion of the tenor of his talk, "perhaps you would use your influence with her to favor us with a song."

"The very appeal which I was making to her," was the unblushing rejoinder. "As I was just saying, I had never seen the being whose countenance so distinctly suggested a love of music as that of Miss Marvon."

If the remark, confessedly made in haste, that all men are liars, is to be credited, they are, at least, not liars in the same degree. Some have a natural gift that way which art can scarcely improve; and for audacity, exaggeration, and a really remarkable faculty of impromptu invention, Mr. Hindon might be called a champion liar. What gave breadth and splendor to his efforts was his contempt for consistency, which saved him all that strain upon the memory and trouble of dovetailing which affects most men in his profession. The lie came as natural, swift, and instinctive to him as the flicker of a serpent's tongue. On the other hand, this habitual practice weakened the effect

of what he said; and after a day or two, when he found an opportunity to renew his suit, Mary knew enough of him to reject it with an amused indifference, as though he had offered her a wax apple instead of a real one.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ROMAN VILLA.

It is a well-known, though unacknowledged, fact, that diligent and hard-working persons can always find time for special purposes, while those who have nothing to do have rarely a moment to spare from their absorbing occupation. Thus it happened that at Letcombe Hall, whose inmates had only to follow the bent of their own fancies, arrangements for any expedition were made with difficulty, and in most cases put off indefinitely at the last moment. The treat which Professor Parks had promised himself, of acting as cicerone to Mary in the matter of the Roman Villa, had hung on hand for many weeks, and certainly through no material obstructions. There were vehicles in abundance at the Hall, at the disposal of any guest; the ejaculation of "more curricles!" attributed to the Indian nabob, would have there found a ready response; but in Mary's case not only man and horse were needed, but a chaperon. It was impossible, notwithstanding the eulogium passed upon the professor by his hostess, that he could escort Mary alone; the expedition was too fatiguing for Mrs. Paton, and the other ladies always devised some excuse for absenting themselves. The real reason was that they had been there already, and suffered under the professor's patronage, and were not going to risk it—nay, there was no risk, it was a certainty—to undergo it a second time. Every one who has visited the Royal Academy in company with an art critic, or gone over the docks with an authority on statistics, will know why they shrank from visiting the Roman Villa in custody of Professor Parks. As a rule, people are wonderfully patient under the application of information; a very little

of it, I confess, goes a great way with me, though I don't mind a sprinkling ; but no one likes a douche bath of it.

It may be naturally suggested that Miss Adela Parks was the proper person to accompany her brother and Mary to this interesting spot, and, indeed, this was suggested to her. With admirable presence of mind she threw herself upon the protection of her host.

"I correct Porson's proofs," she said, "but need I listen to his lectures? Are the obligations of the tie of blood to have no limit?" This skilful appeal to Mr. Paton's prejudices had the effect intended, and he threw the ægis of his protection round her as regarded the visit to the Roman Villa.

One morning, however, to the astonishment of the whole party, Mr. Beryl Paton announced his intention of going himself. The revolution worked by this announcement in the views of the "happy family" was very remarkable. It was as though Louis XIV. had, in the depth of winter, announced his intention of going to dine in the open air at Marly. What a moment ago would have seemed madness became the most natural, or at all events the most delightful, proposition in the world. The professor found himself for once the centre of attraction, and was reminded by everybody of the last (and first) time he had been so good as to act as their cicerone. They said that they should never forget it—which was very true. They paid this attention to the professor in order that Mary should not flatter herself that she was the cause of Mr. Paton's unlooked-for resolve; but in their hearts they knew that she *was* the cause, and that he did not care one farthing for either the professor's lecture or its subject. When the vehicles drove round to the front door, they were found to consist of two barouches and a pony-carriage, into the latter of which, amid the hushed amaze of all beholders, the host quietly handed Mary Marvon and drove away with her, leaving the rest to follow, in a state of mind by no means suitable to an expedition of pleasure. The gentlemen shrugged their shoulders, the ladies looked unutterable things; and Miss Parks (who had thought it best, "for dear Porson's sake," to make one of the party after all) confessed to herself, with her hostess's delicate

state of health in her mind, that Mr. Beryl Paton might not, after all, be quite so monogamous as she had imagined.

As for Mrs. Welbeck, in replying with her laced handkerchief to a flutter of farewell from Mrs. Paton's window, she audibly muttered "Poor woman!" Dr. Bilde alone wore a look of content; his habit of inflicting pain for scientific purposes, which at first had only made him indifferent, had begotten a relish for it; and the spectacle of so many fellow-creatures in the torments of jealousy, from which he himself was free, gave him a sensible satisfaction.

Though Mary Marvon was quite unaware of the envy that she had thus excited, she was conscious of the compliment her host had paid her, and, to say truth, would have gladly dispensed with it. It placed her in a position of prominence from which she shrank. But the pleasure, and even triumph, that had lit up Mrs. Paton's face when she said, "My husband intends to take you in the pony carriage," had prevented her from showing the least unwillingness to accept his courtesy.

Beryl Paton had an easy, natural way with him, however, which put those who were themselves natural at their ease at once. Pretence was pitiful in his eyes, and flattery hateful, though his very good-nature sometimes prevented its due repression. He talked of the country, its pursuits and pleasures, as compared with those of the town, and gently drew out his companion's views. Then he spoke of life at Letcombe Hall, which, he said, he feared was dull and gloomy to her—a question which she combated with modest gratitude, speaking, as well she might, of the kindness and consideration she had met with at Mrs. Paton's hands, and of the deep affection which she bore her. Then he spoke of his guests, not cynically, or with the least breach of the laws of hospitality, but in a manner that astounded her, from the keen appreciation which he showed of the characters of each. She had hitherto been in doubt as to whether he was hoodwinked by them, or absolutely indifferent to their proceedings; she now found that he was neither; though their personal feelings as regarded himself seemed to have absolutely no interest for him.

“He who confers a benefit,” he said, “and looks for gratitude, gives nothing; if he expects subservience, he sells his favors at a higher price than they are worth. It is said, Miss Marvon,” he added, with a pleasant smile, “that the way of transgressors is hard, but I do assure you that that of the practical philanthropist is still harder.”

This was a subject on which she could be hardly expected to have an opinion; she could only murmur something about “deserts” and “merits.”

“It has, of course, been my object to discover them,” he replied. “My good people”—he pointed with his thumb at the two vehicles behind them, as the proprietor of a travelling circus might have indicated the contents of his caravans—“have all something to recommend them; most of them have originality and talent, for which I can hardly be wrong in securing a fair field. But I sometimes wonder whether I am on the right tack—whether, perhaps, I should not do better in securing the happiness of less eminent persons. I will suppose, for argument’s sake, that the worth and genuineness of each class are equal; in the latter case the benefits seem more certain, the effect more practical. What do you say, Miss Marvon?”

The question did not embarrass Mary, as perhaps he expected it would do, since he kept his eyes averted from her as he put it. It had, in her eyes, no personal reference to herself whatever.

“I am afraid I scarcely understand you, Mr. Paton,” she rejoined. “I can hardly think you can be serious—”

“I am quite serious in asking your advice,” he put in, quietly.

“But if I may believe what everybody tells me, Mr. Paton, you already practise the system of which you speak. It is not only the wise and learned, but the poor and friendless, who have reason to be grateful to you.”

“Tut, tut! that is what fools call charity—the parting with a few coppers which one doesn’t want to people whose penury magnifies them to crown-pieces. The rich man who does not give to the poor is a mere chrysalis devil. No, where I have erred, as I believe, is in not having sufficiently given my attention to the well-being of

young people. I should like, for example, to smooth for them the rough path of true love, and set those who are worthiest of them independent of the frowns of fate."

"It is, at all events, a kindly aspiration," said Mary.

"That is not very encouraging, Miss Marvon," replied the old man, with a strange smile, "but it is an honest answer."

Here they arrived where the road forked. "Would you like to see Dottrell Knob?" he said; "it is not much out of our way." And without waiting for her reply, he took the left-hand road which led up to the downs. Here they were on a high plateau, so level that the elevation he spoke of, though of no great height, loomed before them like an Egyptian pyramid. No doubt it reminded him of this, for he presently said, "How little can men who have not genius leave behind them to remind posterity of their existence; their memory fades out and dwindles, day by day, when once they have left the scene of their labors."

"Fortunately, that is an idea that troubles few people," said Mary, thoughtfully; "at least, one's notion is that those who do most good think least about it, so far as they themselves are concerned; and thereby, without meaning it, endure the longest in the hearts of others."

"Still, the hearts of others are not a very enduring sepulchre. To know that to die means to be forgotten, makes death less welcome. I can remember, as a young man, that I thought I should never die. I seemed of such importance, not only to myself, but in the scheme of creation, that it seemed to me the very judgment-day must needs happen first."

Mary stared at him in wonder, not so much at the monstrous egotism of which he spoke, as at his confession of it to a girl of her age and in her position. She did not then know that it was her companion's habit to indulge every impulse, and especially that of confiding to those who took his fancy the strangest and most secret things. Still less did she guess that this mark of favor was often the precursor to the appearance of the name of its recipient in Mr. Beryl Paton's will.

They had now reached the Knob, a mere huge hillock

of green surrounded by fir-trees, the only sign of vegetation on the whole plateau.

"It is supposed," he said, "though such cases of solitary sepulture are very uncommon, that one person only has been buried there—one of those early British chiefs about whom the professor will discourse to you by the hour. I have caused, as you see"—he pointed to a large fissure in the mound-side—"excavations to be made in it, but they reveal nothing. When I die—or, rather, if I die before I have left written directions to that effect—will you be so good as to remember, Miss Marvon, that I enjoined it upon you that I should be buried there?"

Mary bowed her head; she was speechless with astonishment, and, indeed, with something like alarm. She called to mind what Mr. Rennie had once said of her present companion, that though some people called him a philanthropist at large, others thought he ought not to be at large, being as mad as a March hare; and what he had just said looked really very like madness. The next moment, however, Mr. Paton seemed to have forgotten all about his late extraordinary request, and was pointing with his whip to the spot in the valley (into which they were already descending) where lay the object of their journey.

When they reached it they found the rest of the party already arrived there, and awaiting them at the entrance of the Roman Villa; not from respect to their host, but because the admission was sixpence a head, and they thought it just as well that that gentleman should pay it. As nothing was paid for by the guests at Letcombe Hall except their washing, the habit, perhaps, had become fixed; or, as they had all seen the place before and did not want to see it again, they thought it only reasonable that they should be admitted gratis. The villa had been discovered on land belonging to two small proprietors, each of whom laid claim to the exhibition of it, so that in an open turnip-field there was the curious spectacle of a couple of huts, each with a turnstile and a money-taker, as at the Crystal Palace. No. 1 claimed precedence and a superior attraction, upon the ground that what he had to show had been first discovered; No. 2 had been later in the field, but had

a greater store of antiquities to offer. So, though their names were Brown and Jones, they had been dubbed by the professor Romulus and Remus.

To my mind there is always something disappointing in antiquities; so much has to be taken for granted, so little is visible save to the eye of faith. Even at Pompeii one has rather to take the word of the learned than the evidence of one's own observation. "This was a public-house," for example, they tell us. "Many dozens of amphoræ, etc."—which have all been removed—"were found here." Of course one doesn't expect to see the "pot-boy," nor the inevitable hanger-on of "pubs" outside, waiting for a job, but there is always a great deficiency of detail. In this case, however, the professor supplied it. The first apartment in the villa, for instance, looked uncommonly like a place where an apartment was in course of construction, but had not as yet got beyond the ground-plan. But for the professor Mary would hardly have recognized the gray marl flooring for "tesseræ," seen "evidence of fire" in the centre of them, or the "five flue tiles" actually *in situ*. To her uninstructed gaze they resembled rubbish which the workmen had left and would presently cart away. Yet there was an earthenware drain-pipe fixed into the wall, unmistakably, said the professor, of Roman make, besides a heap of charcoal and some pottery, which, though broken, was brimful of archæological interest. Then there was the hypocaust, which, though it had tiles and a flue, was not easy to distinguish from a neglected hothouse wherefrom the flower-pots had been removed; and a magnificent example (said the professor) of a *suspensura*, or suspended floor, though, tired, perhaps, of its state of suspense, it had vanished altogether. It is fair to state that some apartments had really some ornamentation, though the phrase "wall paintings of great beauty," which the professor applied to them, seemed a little too flattering. Among them was a faded individual with a lyre playing to various blocks and splashes in mosaic, which the professor confidently asserted to be Orpheus and the brutes. He insisted upon poor Mary's identifying some of these with fauns, peacocks, and the like, and on her making suggestions as to the rest. In a sort of despera-

tion, assisted, perhaps, by the association of the creature with street music, she gave it as her opinion that one was a monkey, and thereby unwittingly established her reputation.

"By jingo!" exclaimed the professor, "and so it is; but in no Orpheus pavement, though we have many specimens of them in this favored land, has such an animal been heretofore discovered. My dear Miss Marvon, I congratulate you; when I have finished my work on "Prehistoric England" I shall give my attention to these more modern matters, and you will then find yourself, I hope, not altogether unknown to fame."

"But are you sure it *is* a monkey?" observed Mr. Naylor, cynically.

The professor was furious; to snatch a new discovery from the grasp of an archæologist is to rob the tigress of her last-born whelp.

"It is a presentment of one, at all events, sir," he answered, viciously.

"It is most certainly a monkey," said Mr. Hindon, always prompt to acquiesce with the last speaker.

"And there can be no one," sneered Dr. Bilde, who had no such instinct, "who is a better authority on such a subject than yourself."

If the professor had not here interposed his authority, as being in a manner "in the chair," and proceeded to descant with great fire and energy upon a copper coin (looking very like a bad half-penny) of the time of Honorius, there might have been an unpleasantness.

"What does the professor mean?" inquired Mary, confidentially, of Mrs. Welbeck, "by a coin being found *in situ*?"

"Heaven knows, my dear," answered that lady, who did not quite perceive the point of the observation, "but I saw him take it out of his pocket."

Up to this point Mary had earned golden opinions from the lecturer by reason of her attention and intelligence, but her reputation was doomed to be short-lived. They had now arrived in the Chamber of the Four Seasons; that is, the chamber whose floor had in each of its four corners a representation of the Seasons, but only one was

left. It depicted a lady with very scanty drapery, and the great question was, was she Summer, or was she Winter? It was argued, with what might be literally termed a decent probability, that nothing but a very high temperature could have excused her appearing in so very slight a garb. She had, however, an object in her hand which some persons of imagination, among whom was the professor, contended was a starved bird, and on the strength of this allegorical design they insisted upon it that she was Winter. The professor had just opened his brief upon this favorite subject, which naturally required delicate and euphuistic treatment, when a terrible thing happened to Mary; she heard in the next apartment her host speaking to some new-comer in a tone of hearty welcome, and then a reply in tones that had once been dear to her, but which she had hoped never to hear again.

"You were quite right to come on here," said Mr. Paton, cheerily. "I owe you an apology for not remaining at home to receive you." Then came the voice again, uttering some commonplace courtesy, which nevertheless set poor Mary's heart beating, and her pretty cheeks aflame. Of the professor's lecture she caught nothing; she knew that he was appealing to her about the starved bird, but did not know that he was calling the opponents of his theory hard names; she only caught the one word, parrot.

"Yes," she said, with a pretence of earnest conviction, "no doubt it's a parrot."

There was a little shout of laughter, in which the professor did not join, a sudden silence, such as is caused by a new arrival, and then his introduction to the various members of the party by his host. Mary did not turn her eyes that way, but kept them fixed upon the starved bird till Mr. Paton's voice addressed her.

"Miss Marvon, my friend Mr. Edgar Dornay—one of the young people," he added, in a whisper, "I have asked to Letcombe, in hopes to make the Hall more pleasant to you."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DISCORDANT ELEMENTS.

How much more happiness there would be in the world, if only people were allowed to be happy in their own way ! But even the best of men and women, who really have at heart the happiness of others, too often disregard this ; they insist upon making people happy *their* way, and fail egregiously.

Jones loves Smith, and Jones loves Brown, but, not content with their reciprocation of his affection, he wants Smith and Brown to be devoted to one another. This, however, they steadily refuse to be. Smith cannot imagine what Jones sees in Brown, and Brown cannot imagine what Jones sees in Smith, and when it is pointed out to them they deny its existence. A very strong Jones might take Smith and Brown and knock their heads together, but to unite their hearts he will find impossible. And if this coalition be difficult in matters of friendship, how much more is it in those of love !

It was one of the weaknesses of Mr. Beryl Paton to be blind to this fact. He was masterful by nature ; wealth and power had increased this characteristic in him ; and when he said, " Bless you, my children ! love one another," to two young people, he expected them to do it—and not to be long about it, either."

He had conceived a great regard, as we know, for Mary Marvon, and, thinking, in his princely manner, over what he could do for her, it struck him that he would make an heiress of her, and marry her to Mr. Edgar Dornay. He had taken a fancy to Edgar, as being a young man of intelligence and position, who took an interest in the affairs of other people ; and, though development of artistic taste in the middle classes did not seem to Mr. Paton so vital as it does to some people (for, apart from his own particular weaknesses, he was a man of sense), he admitted that there

was something in it, and at all events was pleased to see one of our golden or gilt youths—the young gentleman in question—concerning himself with that matter, instead of devoting himself exclusively to the ballet and pigeon-shooting.

Of Mary's former acquaintance with Edgar he had no suspicion; though, if he had taken the trouble to reflect upon it, he would have seen the probability of it. It was a subject on which Mrs. Paton had her reasons for silence; and, indeed, in any case she would not have ventured to trouble her husband with any such matter, which he would have set down under the general head of "rubbish" or "tittle-tattle." He had, indeed, casually informed her that he meant to invite Mr. Ralph Dornay and his newly-married wife to Letcombe Dottrell—an intention, as we know, she had communicated to Mary—but he had not said one word about Edgar. Nay, what was curious, when one remembers his views upon the tie of blood, he had never asked himself the question whether Ralph's society would be agreeable to his nephew, or *vice versâ*.

Under the circumstances, one can imagine what a charming addition to the Happy Family—their relations to one another being such as have been described—these three new-comers, with *their* relations to one another, must needs have been. That Charles Sotheran, no friend of Edgar's, and an open foe of Ralph's, should have also arrived on the same day, would in itself have been an embarrassing circumstance, but for the other entanglements and dilemmas, which, by contrast, made that smooth sailing, and threw its awkwardness into the shade. It would have been only natural for Charley to have put up at Bank Cottage; but Mr. Paton, in pursuance of his notable plan of making the Hall pleasant to Mary, had insisted on his being his guest; and it is fair to say that in this he was not depriving Mrs. Sotheran of her son's society, since he had obtained from the authorities of the Probate-office a special holiday for Charley, independent of his usual vacation.

In the Roman villa Edgar and Mary had met as strangers. The former, whatever his faults, was a gentleman, after all—albeit of the superficial sort—and, perceiving

her distress and embarrassment, had confined himself to the coldest civilities. He, of course, had been aware that he should meet her at Letcombe Hall, and perhaps had entertained a hope that he had been invited thither not without her cognizance, or even approval. If it were so, her manner had disabused him of that idea at once. He felt that he had no chance with her; that his appearance had pained and annoyed her exceedingly; and, to do him justice, he had henceforth no other object than to make his stay under the same roof as little embarrassing to her as possible. Mr. Paton, like the rest, had taken them for strangers to one another, and in driving home with Mary had spoken to her of Edgar under that misapprehension. She was thereupon compelled to tell him that they had known one another before, but did not feel called upon to say under what circumstances. She could not conceal a certain awkwardness in speaking of the matter, and this he set down to a cause the exact contrary to that from which it arose. He fancied that she was not indifferent to Edgar, and that she had purposely adopted an airy manner towards him to conceal the fact, not only from others but himself. It might easily have happened that the difference in their positions as to means had hitherto placed, and still seemed to place, an insuperable bar between them; and hence her unwillingness to encourage him—an idea which, as often happens, fitted in with the wishes and intentions of him who entertained it. It was one of Mr. Beryl Paton's favorite occupations to remove insuperable bars. He presently informed Mary that Ralph Dornay and his wife were coming to the Hall that very day.

"The raptures of the honeymoon," he added, with a grim smile, "are not, I suppose, quite over, so they have preferred to travel by themselves, rather than in the same train with Edgar."

Mary thought to herself that there might have been other reasons, and even that if they knew he had been invited they would not have come at all.

In this, however, she was mistaken. Things had happened since she had parted from Mrs. Beckett of which she knew nothing; and a reconciliation of a somewhat

skin-deep kind had taken place. That a change had come over Lady Orr (as she now termed herself) was evident enough. She was standing, with Mrs. Paton, at the front door as the pony-carriage drew up, and, hardly waiting for the expression of her host's welcome, not only held out both her hands to Mary, but, encouraged doubtless by her forgiving face, drew her towards her in an affectionate embrace.

"Let bygones be bygones, my dear," she whispered; and as Mary kissed her she felt the other's tears upon her cheek.

"What *can* have happened?" thought Mary; but she was well pleased at what had come of it, whatever it was. She was human enough in her resentment of wrong and insult, but at the least show of penitence—and this was something more: it was tender remorse—her heart melted like wax. For a moment, however, she attributed Mrs. Beckett's behavior, in part at least, to Mrs. Paton's influence, who was looking on at this little scene with obvious satisfaction.

In the great hall they found Mr. Ralph Dornay, examining the pictures on the walls with a critical eye. His reception by Mr. Paton (who had never seen him before) was sufficiently cordial, but by no means the same welcome he had given to his wife. His manner, though singularly courteous (when he did not intend it to be otherwise), could boast of many gradations. Ralph seemed to feel that there was leeway to be made up, and was so profuse in his compliments and his self-congratulations at finding himself at Letcombe Dottrell that he seemed to forget Mary's presence altogether, till his host drew his attention to it.

"Miss Marvon I think you know."

"I have that honor," said Ralph, with a beaming smile, and touched Mary's hand with his finger-tips.

He saw at once that she was in favor, and that the scornful patronage with which he had intended to treat her would be very injudicious; on the other hand, he knew her character too well to expect any advantage from conciliation. To have gained a footing at Letcombe Hall, even as Lady Orr's husband, was a great step for Mr.

Ralph Dornay; and it was an object with him to make it secure. He had altogether different views from those he had entertained in his bachelor days; and in the greeting which he presently gave to his nephew, though studiously polite, it was easy to see that the countenance of the "head of the house" was no longer of much consequence to him. He had found his present pecuniary position a much better passport to society, though somewhat irregularly used, than the blood of the Dornays. "Openings in life" are not for young men only; middle age has also its aspirations; and Ralph had in his eye, not only a "position in the county," where his wife's country-house was situated, but a seat in Parliament. His deportment had been always unexceptionable, but he now began to use a certain dignity, especially to those he considered his inferiors. When Charley Sotheran, for example, made his appearance at the Hall just before the dinner-hour (having dutifully passed his afternoon at Bank Cottage), Ralph Dornay acknowledged his somewhat cool "How are you?" with stately frigidity, and pushed out two fingers, as though they had been the antennæ of an insect, by way of salutation; whereupon Charley also pushed out two, so that, instead of shaking hands, these gentlemen appeared to be crossing swords with their fingers—an action, as it turned out, which might have been taken as very significant of their mutual relations.

Of this last meeting Mary was not a spectator. She had been glad enough to go to her own room and stay there in quiet after the occurrences of the day. She had not been long occupied with her own reflections when Mrs. Paton knocked at her sitting-room door. "The house is now so full of people, my dear," she said, apologetically, "that I must snatch a quarter of an hour with you when I can. How do you like the Roman villa, or rather the professor's dissertation upon it? I am afraid you have had more than enough of it."

"I confess, dear Mrs. Paton, that I am a little tired."

"There was something else to trouble you besides the lecture, was there not, my dear?" continued the old lady, very tenderly. "When we were talking of a certain person the other day I little dreamed that we should see him

here; indeed, as you know, I was ignorant of his identity. You may be quite certain it is not my fault—”

“My dear Mrs. Paton, it was nobody’s fault,” put in Mary. Then, with a smile—which, to say the truth, was a little forced—she added, “Nay, it is not even any one’s misfortune. As I told you the other day, I have got over that matter: it is almost as though it had never been.”

“You say ‘almost,’ Mary. Now, pray tell me—for indeed I do not ask it without reason—what you mean by that word.”

“I mean that though I can never love Edgar Dornay again, the sight of him did give me some distress; for a day or two it may still continue to do so; but—I am sure of this, from what I feel already—his presence will affect me less and less. Of course,” she added, “if I thought he had come down here with any idea of pressing his attentions on me, why, then I should go away.”

“Go away! Good heavens! do not talk like that,” exclaimed Mrs. Paton, with alarm. “You do not know what that would mean to me, my darling. Of course he shall not press them. I only wanted to make certain of your own sentiments.”

“They are as fixed as fate, and quite unalterable,” said Mary, with a touch of haughtiness. “On the other hand, I must needs absolve Mr. Dornay, so far as I could judge by his manner, of any intention of annoying me.”

“No doubt—no doubt,” said the old lady, thoughtfully. “I feel sure he comes here with no such intention. It was not his doing at all. You must not mind if you are placed next to him at dinner. I will let him know that it is not your wish.”

“That will be quite unnecessary,” said Mary, drawing herself up and speaking very coldly. “Forgive me, dear Mrs. Paton,” she added, tenderly, perceiving distress in the other’s looks. “I know I have no right to be proud, but a girl’s love—whoever she be—is her own to give or to withhold.”

“Quite true—quite true,” assented the old lady. “Would that all girls were like you. Then men, perhaps,” she added, with a sigh, “would be less sinful. All

I wish to say is, that if Edgar Dornay seems to be thrown in your way here it will not be his doing."

"Thrown in my way!" echoed Mary, in amazement.

"Yes; it may be so just for a little while. If it is so, do not visit it upon him as if it were his fault. Bear with it, darling, for my sake. Oh! why did they come, why did they come to vex you, when we were so happy?"

"Dear Mrs. Paton, do not weep," said Mary, throwing herself upon her knees and kissing the old lady's hands. "Who am I that a little inconvenience to me—for that is what it all comes to, after all—should thus affect you? Why should we not be as we were before? How long are they going to stay?"

"I don't know, darling. I know nothing. Perhaps for a week or two; perhaps—but it is impossible to say—people come here for a week and stay for years. Some one will come some day and take you away from me. Or perhaps I shall die and leave you to their tender mercies. Oh! Mary, darling, if I could only see you married to the man of your choice!"

"But I don't want to be married," said Mary, laughing; "and I haven't made a choice."

"Hush!" cried Mrs. Paton. "What is that?"

Through the evening air there rang out the cheerful notes of a key-bugle. Some one was playing it on the veranda that ran round the house, and it seemed to awaken the echoes from a hundred hills.

"I—I think," said Mary, "it must be Charley; at least, I know that he does play the bugle, and that the 'Echo Song' is his delight. But he would surely never venture—"

"Hark, hark!" murmured Mrs. Paton. "It is my Henry's bugle. Dear, dear! if Beryl were to hear it!"

If Beryl did not hear it, Beryl must have been as deaf as Marcom, his mute. The key-bugle, played however skillfully, is scarcely muffled music. There is small dispute as to its being the most inspiring of instruments. Even Mrs. Paton, despite the melancholy association to which she had alluded, felt a sense of cheeriness as she listened to it, to which she had been a stranger for many a year. As for Mary, the melody stirred her heart within her, and seemed,

like a wholesome breeze, to sweep away the atmosphere of intrigue and greed that permeated Letcombe Hall.

"I suppose that confounded row means dinner in half an hour," ejaculated Ralph Dornay, who had already retired to his dressing-room; for his toilette, always elaborate, now consumed more time than ever.

But the music meant nothing of the sort; it was simply a happy thought of Charley's, who, having been informed by the garrulous Mrs. Welbeck of the existence of his favorite instrument somewhere in the house, had ferreted it out at her request, and, without leave or license, was exercising its vocal powers.

The Happy Family were astonished, but by no means displeased: they foresaw that in taking this unprecedented liberty one of the new-comers had done for himself in the eyes of their host and patron. Had they known that this particular sound was connected with the habits of his dead son, they would have been jubilant indeed, since they would have felt certain of its arousing his extreme resentment; but noise of all kinds they knew he hated, and confidently calculated upon an outburst of indignation.

As Mary left her room she met Mr. Paton in the passage, and they descended the great stairs together.

"What charming airs some one has been playing on the bugle!" she said.

"Do you think so?" he answered, quickly. "I am sure it will please the player to hear it."

Mary blushed at this—perhaps for shame at having spoken of Charley's performance so diplomatically.

Mr. Paton looked at her, with a pleasant smile. "Such a burst of melody was a little alarming," he said; "but, as you say, it was very exhilarating. It is like the breath of youth, and puts new life in this old house. I knew Dornay was musical, but I had no idea he played the bugle."

Mary was silent, and, feeling that her silence was almost an act of duplicity, blushed again.

Nothing more was said on the subject until they were seated at dinner, to which Edgar took her in, at Mrs. Paton's request. Then the host, looking across the table to the young couple, observed, in a loud voice, "Your per-

formance in the veranda just now was much admired, let me tell you, Dornay, by your fair neighbor."

Edgar looked up in some surprise. "It was not I, sir, I assure you; I have not the skill, nor even the breath for it."

"Then who on earth was it?" asked Mr. Paton, knitting his brow.

"If you mean the key-bugle, and that row in the veranda, sir," said Charley, modestly, "I am afraid that was me."

Then followed an uncomfortable silence, broken only by Mr. Hindon's sympathetic tones.

"A very candid confession, Mr. Sotheran, though not quite grammatically expressed. Your frankness does you honor."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DR. BILDE.

As regarded the new arrivals at the Hall, and the effects produced by them upon the Happy Family, the result of the first day's innings—and even of the next two or three—was distinctly in favor of Charles Sotheran. It was easily to be seen that Edgar Dornay, and not he, was first favorite with Mr. Beryl Paton; and to be not a favorite, and still more to be "out of the running," was equivalent to popularity with this very peculiar "ring." As Mr. Paton, however, was not actually hostile to Charley, but only discouraging, some thought it worth their while to play him against Edgar, and to make friends with him on their own account. His natural and outspoken ways, so different from the manner that they would themselves have assumed had they been in his position, gave them the impression of simplicity, and seemed to adapt him for a cat's-paw. They took his satire—which was sometimes sufficiently severe—for awkwardness, and imagined, even while they winced, that he trod upon their toes by mistake, and not by design. To them Edgar's cultivated

tone and greater knowledge of the world made him appear, even without his host's obvious good-will, a much more formidable rival.

Mr. Marks, indeed, who had a natural turn for intrigue, and thought he detected in Mary's manner a leaning towards Charley, determined to use this guileless young government clerk for his own purposes, and laid himself out to please him; and what greater benefit (thought he) could he confer upon him than to teach him the science of metaphysics? He therefore took him out—as a philosopher of old might have taken some promising youth into the groves of Academe—into the woods and fields, and discoursed of “Kant's method,” to Charley's obvious enjoyment. It was a stroke of humor, as the young man well understood, of which Fortune could not have many samples in her bag, and he welcomed it accordingly. There was a terracc-walk within view, but out of earshot of the house, which was Mr. Marks's favorite training-ground. Let us listen as they discourse together: one great advantage in metaphysics being, that one can strike in anywhere and understand from an isolated fragment as much as may be gathered from an entire system.

“But where are our categories?” inquires Mr. Marks; “the rules which the understanding, by means of its own essential law, lays at the foundation of nature for joining all the given divinity in our consciousness? Do you follow me, Mr. Sotheran?”

Charley nodded. As he certainly did not keep up with Mr. Marks, it was allowable, perhaps, thus to indicate that he followed him.

“It would be difficult, you see, my young friend, to get on without the categories.”

“Very difficult,” admitted Charley, whose head was revolving.

“Moreover, our category extends beyond the sensible.”

“Most certainly,” said Charley, eagerly. Whenever he could conscientiously agree with Mr. Marks he did it with effusion.

“The fact is, if I take away all thinking (in other words, what occurs through the categories) from an empiric cognition, there remains no cognition at all, since by mere in-

tuition nothing at all is thought. Then, what is the question that presents itself?"

As the speaker here hovered over his subject, Charley imagined that he was being interrogated. "Why think at all?" he hazarded.

For a moment Mr. Marks regarded him with severe suspicion; but, perceiving in the young man's face an earnest gravity (the same he wore when interviewed by legatees in the Probate-office), he answered, "There is something in that: the conception of a noumenon."

"I hope so," said Charley, modestly; "but I am not absolutely certain of what a noumenon is."

"Well, it's a long story," said Mr. Marks. "A noumenon, however, to state it briefly, is the opposite of a phenomenon. That gentleman yonder"—he indicated Mr. Josiah Nayler, who was approaching them with the object of breaking up their conference—"is a noumenon."

Mr. Nayler was jealous of the attraction which Mr. Marks's conversation seemed to have for Charley, and would fain have taught him his great system of the unsubstantiality of things. But, unfortunately for his hopes of a proselyte, he had offended Charley. After his rejection by Mary Marvon, Mr. Nayler had begun perhaps to have doubts as to whether that young lady was not a presentment after all; at all events, he treated her as if she had no existence. To say that Charley resented this was much to understate his indignation. There were occasions (such as when Mr. Nayler would ignore some remark of Mary's, or lift his eyes in scornful indifference of it) when Charley could hardly help "going for" the legs of that lofty philosopher, for higher he could not hit him. In any other way than by doing battle against her enemies poor Charley could not show his devotion. Not only did Mary herself offer him no encouragement, but Mrs. Paton had privately informed him that to pay that young lady any marked attention would injure her in the estimation of her host. She even went so far as to hint to him that her husband had set his heart upon an alliance between her and Mr. Edgar Dornay—an idea that would have been insupportable to him, had he not been well persuaded that such an event could never take place. Indeed, it was not

desired even by Edgar himself. "First love," he openly observed, in his light way, "is like a half-smoked cigar: when once it has gone out the aroma is fled; it will never take the match again; there is nothing for it but to try another weed."

Dr. Bilde nodded assent, but disbelieved the speaker. His keen eye had detected that previous relations of a confidential kind had at one time existed between Edgar and Mary, and, judging from his own resolute soul, deemed passion to be less evanescent. He concluded that, if Edgar had given up hope, jealousy of a successful rival would at least remain with him, and calculated upon his hostility to Charley, and on his readiness to do him an ill turn. The doctor alone of all the Happy Family had recognized in the young government clerk not only an uncompromising antagonist, but a foeman worthy of his steel; but he was not on that account made more particular as to his weapons—the very last thing he thought of was a fair fight.

It must not be supposed that Charley's free-and-easy manner towards him, or even the scornful way with which he ventured to combat his most cherished theories, were alone the cause of his enmity. There was a far deeper reason for it—so deep that none but himself ever guessed at its existence. He hated the young fellow because he perceived that he loved Mary, and suspected her of reciprocating his love—for Dr. Bilde intended Mary for himself.

It was true he despised her opinions, which in her mouth made him furious. Her kindness of heart, her gentleness to all about her, were not only lost upon him, but even exercised such an attraction of repulsion that he was capable, if he had dared, of using the most offensive language to her. It could not quite be said of him—

"He hated her with the hate of hell,
But loved her beauty passing well"—

for his nature was rather cold than gross, but his dislike of the best qualities of her heart and mind were overpowered by his admiration for her as a woman. Her independence of character and obvious indifference to her own interests, as regarded Mr. Paton, exacted his unstinted hom-

age ; and he felt that, if he could only win her, she could be made a worthy mate for him. He looked upon her with the eyes of an ornamental gardener, who sees immense capabilities in a landscape when certain objectionable features shall have been carted away. Yet his spirit was so proud and unbending that he could never swallow a single prejudice, or bate one jot of a dogma, however objectionable in her sight, to recommend himself to her. One may be allowed to imagine (though the idea never so much as crossed Mary's mind), being such as he was as a lover, what sort of a husband this cast-iron man was likely to make.

In her presence he never stooped to pretence, lest (looking, as his custom was, into the future) he should one day give her an opportunity of humiliating him; but with others, in order to obtain her, he had no such scruples. I am afraid it even now suggested itself to him that at no far distant time he would be in a position to make her pay for her audacity in opposing herself to him.

It was necessary to the success of his plans to make friends with Edgar Dornay, and this was not achieved without eating a leek or two, and the doctor did not like leeks. Like many other young gentlemen nowadays, who have nothing to do, Edgar was "devoted" to art, and flirted with what he had the impudence to call her "handmaid," poetry. Indeed, within the last few weeks he had published a volume of poems, "Heart Throbs," which had made some noise in the world : the little world, that is, in which he lived ; for as to the general public, they paid no more attention to it than a man who has no intention of travelling pays to the thud of a fog-signal. The book was full of harmonious echoes, the only exception being a vehement lyrical attack upon the faithlessness of the fair sex, evoked by that double rejection with which we are acquainted, and really containing some original and vigorous lines. To those who knew the circumstances which occasioned it it also showed great powers of the imagination, for the poet represented himself as not only being in nowise to blame in the matter in question, but as having been treated with much cruelty and deception. This book Dr. Bilde, by an immense effort of intellectual self-de-

nial, and by sitting, as it were, upon all the safety-valves of natural expression, actually brought himself to praise, and thereby made a short cut into the author's good graces.

By this means he put himself on friendly terms with Edgar, and in the combat between himself and Charley—which not seldom enlivened the dinner-table—at least secured his neutrality. The war was not only to the knife between them, but generally about the knife: experiments, and especially vivisection, were the doctor's hobby; nor, although he knew that not only Mary herself, but Beryl Paton, regarded his views on these matters with little short of loathing, could he restrain the expression of them or conceal his contempt for all objectors. The simplest observation from the most ignorant inquirer was sufficient to set him going; nor, with all his wits, had he the power to discriminate questions which were put to him in good faith from those suggested, as they often were by Charles Sotheran, for the purpose of drawing him out and exposing his natural callousness of heart.

"Pain," he would say, "was nothing as compared with knowledge."

"You mean the pain inflicted upon others is nothing," Charley would reply, "as compared with knowledge acquired by one's self."

And then there would ensue a contest so bitter that presently Mr. Beryl Paton would himself have to interfere to stop it, just as in the lists of old the king would cast down his royal baton to prevent contest becoming carnage. I am afraid Mr. Paton took some pleasure in these jousts, and I am sure Charley did.

"I like to bait the brute," he once confessed to Mrs. Beckett, who was remonstrating with him upon the subject. "Only think how he must have baited other brutes!"

And Mrs. Beckett—who was always picturing to herself her magnificent Alexander pegged down to a table, and slowly done to death by this scientific miscreant—admitted that he deserved all he got. If the doctor had but known when to hold his tongue he could, logically, have broken Charley across his knee; but, as it was, he was like

some enormous whale spouting angry foam attacked by a small but agile swordfish.

Once he had a bad toothache, which did not tend to soothe him. In answer to kind inquiries he observed that he had discovered an abscess.

"Then you must be all right," said Charley. "Pain is nothing as compared with the acquisition of knowledge."

At this Dr. Bilde forgot to maintain that "scientific attitude" which he was always recommending as the proper one for all persons of sense; in vulgar phrase, he lost his temper.

"My dear sir," argued Charley, "you tell us 'tenderness of feeling is a proof of intellectual weakness,' and therefore I should be a fool to pity you."

It was a favorite pastime with this young gentleman to egg on Mrs. Welbeck, who, though in reality she talked for the sake of talking, professed to be very desirous of information, to ask the most absurd questions of the doctor, which, nevertheless, since they were in connection with his hobby, obtained attention and a reply.

For example: "I do hope, Dr. Bilde," she observed one day, in her artless manner, "that you have never vivisected a cat."

"I have vivisected fifty cats, madam."

"Dear, dear, how shocking! and I am so fond of cats!"

"At all events, let me assure you that I am not fond of vivisecting them. They scratch and squeal so that I had rather operate on any other animal."

At this there is a horrible silence, of the cause of which Dr. Bilde is profoundly ignorant, and to which, if he had understood it, he would have been profoundly indifferent.

"Then as to the poor dogs," continues Mrs. Welbeck, proceeding with her investigations, "do they not bark and bite?"

"They do in Watts's hymns," returns the doctor, grimly, "but not on the dissecting-table; indeed, as to barking, we take care to stop that; operators who know their business always make a point of dividing the laryngeal nerve as a preliminary."

"Poor Alexander!" murmurs Mrs. Beckett. "My prayer

would be, if Dr. Bilde ever got hold of him, that he should go mad and bite him."

The disgust and loathing expressed in Mary's face are unmistakable; there is a heavy frown on Beryl Paton's brow; but Dr. Bilde, true to his principles, scorns to express one syllable of extenuation or regret. The bull excited by the banderillos is becoming ripe for the torridor.

"Useful as these little experiments on animals may be, Dr. Bilde," observes Charley, with the air of a scientific inquirer, "I suppose if practised on human beings they would have infinitely more significance?"

"No doubt—no doubt, sir," admits the doctor, deceived by the other's tone. "There is so much prejudice, however, abroad—or rather at home, for things in France look much more hopeful—that one despairs of science having fair play."

"How about criminals?" suggests Charley.

At this fancy fly the trout rises with vivacity.

"A very sensible idea, young gentleman—which has, however, occurred to others. What possible objections, save such as occur to folks who have poached eggs for brains, can be urged against thus utilizing condemned persons, for the benefit of the world they are about to leave? It is a plan that recommends itself to every true thinker. On the other hand, there is that troublesome question of relatives" (here he looked towards the host, as being certain of his sympathy in that branch of his argument, at all events): "parents especially are sure to make a commotion."

"How about pauper children who are orphans, about whom no stir is likely to be made?" inquires Charley.

Dr. Bilde is about to remark that public opinion is not yet ripe for the "utilization" of orphan children, when he catches Edgar Dornay's eye. That gentleman has far too delicate a taste to sympathize with brutality, even under the guise of science, but he does not approve of a man who can appreciate "Heart Throbs" being turned into ridicule. Dr. Bilde, thanks to his warning look, suddenly discovers that Charley has been drawing him out, and the entertainment is concluded for that day.

But though Dr. Bilde had conciliated Edgar Dornay, he could not persuade him to join him in alliance, offensive and defensive, against the man whom he took for granted was their common enemy. Edgar had no liking for Charley, but he had no animosity against him; nor, although Dr. Bilde took infinite pains to delicately imply that he was, in fact, his successful rival, could he be moved to aggression. Without having any claim to be called chivalrous, the fact was that Edgar had—up to a certain point—the feelings of a gentleman, which in Dr. Bilde's case did not rise over his shoes. Born of "poor but honest" parents, the doctor had carried out the usual programme of the self-made man of the intellectual type. If money-making had been his aim in life, he would, of course, have come to town with half a crown in his pocket, and swept out a shop; but he had remained in his native village and devoted himself to study. It was a favorite boast with him that he had learned to write, in order to save paper, on the polished thigh-bone of a horse (which Charley used to suggest he had previously vivisected); and in an education conducted on such an economical scale it is probable that the proverbial extra twopence for manners had never been paid. At all events, he had none; and, being naturally devoid of feeling, "the instinct of a gentleman"—which is sometimes, though very rarely, found in mannerless men—was wholly wanting in him. Nor could he understand its existence in others. Having discovered, for certain, that for some reason (to him inscrutable) Edgar Dornay would be no party to a certain scheme of "thorough" which he had resolved to put in practice against Charley, he looked about him for another ally, and, somewhat to his surprise, found one very ready to his hand.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN EAVESDROPPER.

A COUP D'ÉTAT, even though it may have the completest success, has almost always some unpleasant consequences: it can never compare with the gradual advances made by good sense towards good government; and this truth in politics holds good in social life. By one bold push Ralph Dornay had found his way through insurmountable obstacles to the very height of fortune, had gained a position which even in his audacious youth had never entered into his dreams, but yet he was not happy. There are always inconveniences in sitting on a pinnacle, and in his case they were increased by the consciousness of how he got there. If one might venture on such a comparison in the case of a gentleman who was practically in the enjoyment of £30,000 a year, he was like a person who, having committed by a happy impulse a most successful murder, has made no arrangements for concealing the evidences of his crime. His capture of the rich widow was so suddenly conceived, and so promptly carried out, that he had not had time to give due consideration to his subsequent behavior. He knew, of course, that she had married him out of pique; but, if he had been a wise man, he would never have let her know that he knew it. He might not have been able to convince her of his own disinterested love, but to hint that, so far as that question was concerned, he and she were quits, was most injudicious; yet on their first quarrel, which had taken place within twenty-four hours of their wedding, he had more than hinted as much. A woman of sense will bear a good deal from a bad husband, but she will not stand being reminded of her own folly in having married him.

Of course, their quarrel was about money matters. Mr. Rennie had carried out the widow's directions to the letter in tying up her property, and even her income was

supposed to be at her own disposal; but in this latter matter the law lends itself to an agreeable fiction. It places the money, indeed, in the wife's hand; but the husband, being the stronger, forces her fingers open with a gentle violence, and puts it into his own pocket. The phrase "for her separate use and maintenance" becomes, in short, synonymous with "robbery from the person," and there is no remedy. Ralph Dornay wore a velvet glove upon his iron hand; his touch was gentle, but his grasp was full of power. It was in accordance with his own interests—that is, with his ambition to take a high place in society—to behave with propriety to his wife, and he showed her every external mark of respect; but at a very early date he had decided—shortly and sharply, too—the great matrimonial question of "Who shall be master?" in his own favor. It is not too much to say that from that moment his wife detested him. When she looked in her looking-glass she said to herself "Fool!" but when she looked at him (which was more seldom) she said to herself "Thief!" Outwardly they were a well-behaved couple enough. One would have concluded, perhaps, from their mutual behavior, that their marriage had been one of "convenience;" but, as Edgar observed of them, "one would not have guessed that the convenience had been so entirely on one side."

Except for that bitter speech, Edgar said little against his uncle, though he probably made up for that by thinking. He had, as we know, been in a manner reconciled to him. This had been brought about by Lady Orr. Her husband had insisted on it, but we may be sure she made no mention of that to his nephew. She had written to Edgar requesting an interview, and he had called upon her in Park Lane. The bride had met him very frankly, except that she dropped no syllable of that relation to him which had at one time been "on the cards," and had thrown herself upon his generosity.

"There is nothing you can tell me," she said, "of the ill-behavior of my husband towards yourself, which I cannot guess. What I am about to ask of you is for my own sake, not for his. *You* will not humiliate me, I am sure."

This last phrase, while on the one hand it revealed ev-

everything, presented the whole question in a nutshell. Edgar bit his lips, but bowed in acquiescence.

"I know it," she said. "Whatever has been amiss with you, *you* are a gentleman. Unfortunate as my position is, through my own fault—"

He waved his hand just a little, for which she was very grateful—she knew he meant to signify that the fault was not all her own.

"It will be made ten times more unfortunate should you stand aloof from us. You know what the world is saying, even as it is."

"I do not wish to stand aloof from you, Lady Orr."

"It is of my husband that I speak; you, Edgar, are his nephew, his only relative, and the head of his family. If you refuse to take his hand because he has given it to me, it is I who shall be the sufferer."

"Madam," he said, "my uncle is a scoundrel."

She looked neither shocked nor pained, but smiled a bitter smile that went to his very heart. If she had said, "Great heavens! do you suppose I have not found that out for myself?" her lips could not have spoken it more plainly than that smile did. "It is for my sake," she murmured.

Edgar Dornay was not a Dr. Bilde; he had a heart which would have melted at any woman's tears, and this woman had been kind and dear to him. So for her sake he had taken his uncle's hand, and there was peace between them. Ralph did not trouble himself to inquire how the reconciliation had been brought about; he thought that Edgar had shown his wisdom in not "quarrelling with his bread-and-butter," and accepted the result without much thankfulness. The countenance of the head of his house was, as we have said, not of the same importance to him as it had been, but still it *was* important; and now that he found himself under the same roof with Edgar, it was a matter of considerable satisfaction to him that matters had been made smooth between them.

Ralph's relations with Mr. Charles Sotheran had seemed to him by comparison of small consequence; but as the days went on at Letcombe Hall he altered his views on that matter. It was plain that Mary Marvon was the

reigning favorite with both her host and hostess, and it was no less plain that Charley was in love with Mary. Charley, it seemed, was not so popular with Mr. Beryl Paton as Edgar was; it was even clear to Ralph's keen eye that the old man was planning a match between the latter and Mary—an arrangement that would have been distasteful to Ralph, considering the state of that young lady's feelings towards himself. He knew enough of her, it is true, to be sure that it would never take place; but in the meantime, and so long as a chance remained of her complying with Mr. Paton's wishes, Mary was all-powerful. Nay, it was not certain, even if she went counter to them and accepted Charley, that she would altogether lose her hold on the old man's affections.

The very idea of this—that the girl who despised him should marry the young fellow he detested, and be prosperous into the bargain—was wormwood. None who knew Ralph Dornay—or who knew as we do what had been his conduct to his nephew—could call him a warm friend; but, on the other hand, he was a bitter enemy. Even in Park Lane, where he had been but a hanger-on of Edgar's, he had resented the being treated on terms of equality by the young government clerk; it may be imagined therefore how, as the husband of Lady Orr, and the practical possessor of a princely income, he resented it now. I am afraid, indeed, if there was any change in the behavior of Charley towards him, it was the other way, as though he thought him a greater sneak than ever. Of the two classes of individuals, one of which “thinks all the world belongs to them,” and the other “does not care twopence whom it belongs to,” the latter has clearly the advantage: they are equally independent, and have no “position” to keep up. Ralph's assumed dignity never sat so ill upon him as when he opposed it to the arrows of Charley's scorn.

His host's tolerance of the young fellow's impudence, as Ralph termed Charley's natural ways, disgusted him; Mrs. Paton's obvious tenderness for him, Mary's evident good-will, which might any day blossom into love, irritated him exceedingly; but what made him well-nigh beside himself with rage (and the more so because it was

necessary to conceal it) was the affection which Lady Orr herself, more openly than all, showed to this young man. He had always been a favorite with her, till he had almost lost her good graces by his dislike of the Dornays, and his partisanship of Mary's cause against herself. The latter she had forgotten and forgiven, nay, had even confessed to herself that he had been in the right in the matter; while his views in the former case, being now her own, were an actual claim upon her sympathy. To her husband's eyes all proofs of her good-will to Charley were a reflection upon himself.

"How right you were, my dear boy," they seemed to say, "in your estimate of the man I have been so mad as to marry!"

Under these circumstances it will easily be understood in whom Dr. Bilde found an ally in his plans against the young government clerk, and indirectly against Mary. It was, as I have said, to his surprise, for the doctor, of course, was ignorant of Ralph's reasons for hating Charley; but, having found how the land lay, he lost no time in putting his schemes into effect. When scoundrels do agree their unanimity (till its particular object is attained) is extraordinary.

Though her son was at the Hall, Mrs. Sotheran herself was not a frequent visitor there; not so much because the Happy Family were by no means to her taste, as from sheer terror of the possible consequences that might arise at any moment from a certain matter in which she had had an unwilling hand; but Charley was naturally often up at Bank Cottage, and not the less so, we may be sure, that Mary was a frequent visitor there. It was a characteristic of the nervous little widow that she had never spoken to the girl, since her arrival at Letcombe Dottrell, on the matter of which she had written to her from Park Lane. She shrank from the subject, very literally, "with fear and trembling," and it was one which Mary also had no desire to broach. On the other hand it was a "comfort" to Mrs. Sotheran—that morbid sort of satisfaction which persons of her temperament feel in details of personal misfortune—to talk about her own past life to the girl. The scene of these conversations was often the lit-

tle churchyard, where, with their graves around her, she would discourse of her dead husband and her dead children; of the "toiling and moiling" incident to supporting a large family upon a small income; of the difficulties she had had in making both ends meet; and of the anxiety she felt about Charley's future. He was the best son that mother ever had, and she instanced some examples—how, for one thing, he had helped out of his scanty salary to pay her debts—which certainly tended to prove it.

"I never doubted Charley's goodness," replied Mary, on one occasion, in answer to some similar eulogy.

"Nor I yours, my dear," answered Mrs. Sotheran, with a deep sigh; and then—very inconsequently, as it seemed—added, "It is a hard world."

If one had filled up the hiatus between these observations it would have run thus: "Being two such excellent young people, what a pity it is that cruel circumstances have put it out of your power to become one!" I do not say that Mary's blush proved that she had understood as much, but she believed that Mrs. Sotheran would have been glad to call her daughter, save for the obstacle of that stigma of her birth; whereas, if she could have read that lady's thoughts, it was not its stigma, but the peculiar circumstances of it, at which she dared not even hint. In comparison with this the fact of the young folks having no means to marry upon was a small matter. As to Mary's own feelings with respect to Charley, they had certainly changed since the days when Mrs. Beckett had written to his mother, "You need not be alarmed about Mary's falling in love with your boy." She had had at that time, as we know, another attachment; and though, even when that was broken off, she had not looked on Charley with eyes of love, she had of late begun to regard him very favorably. His independent character, his hatred of wrong and cruelty, and that courage of his opinions which he never failed to display against any odds, and to the danger of his own interests, filled her with secret admiration. It is probable, too, that the perseverance of his devotion did not count for nothing. Continual dropping wears away the very granite, and a maiden's heart is of the sandstone formation. Neverthe-

less, Mary took care to reply to Mrs. Sotheran's observation, "It is a hard world," though it was obviously made with a particular significance, in a general sense.

"Yes," she sighed, "the world *is* hard, especially to the poor. I often think that the good people who eulogize work so highly do not know much of over-work."

"Quite true," assented Mrs. Sotheran. "Poor Sarah Dempster yonder" (she pointed to a neighboring tombstone) "was of your opinion. Her epitaph, unlike those of most of us, paints her life as it really was. If you never read it, it is worth your while to do so."

The tombstone stood in a neglected corner of the churchyard, overgrown with nettles and long grasses, but its inscription was still legible :

"Here lies a poor woman, who always was tired ;
 Who lived in a house where help was not hired ;
 Her last words on earth were : ' Dear friends, I am going
 Where washing ain't done, nor sweeping, nor sewing ;
 But everything there is exact to my wishes—
 For where they don't eat there's no washing up dishes.
 I'll be where loud anthems will always be ringing ;
 But, having no voice, I'll get clear of the singing.
 Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me never—
 I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever.' "

"That may not be poetry," observed Mrs. Sotheran, with unconscious plagiarism, "but it's true. There is nothing much worse than over-work."

"Except shame," said Mary, bitterly.

The sentiment, coming, as it seemed, from the girl's very heart, could not be ignored.

"There is no shame where there is no sin," put in the other, in a trembling voice.

"How can there be no shame when one has a past that one dares not look upon—when one has a secret of which one dares not speak?"

"Hush, hush, for Heaven's sake !" whispered her companion, vehemently.

Upon the late Mrs. Dempster's head-stone, which Mary was still regarding, there was projected a tall shadow, and the harsh voice of Dr. Bilde was heard exclaiming, "Good-morning, Mrs. Sotheran. I hope I am not interrupting your meditations among the tombs."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN EXCITEMENT IN THE HAPPY FAMILY.

THE effect of Dr. Bilde's sudden and unforeseen appearance was considerable upon both the ladies, though very different in degree. To Mary he was always objectionable, and the present circumstances were little adapted to set him off to advantage. His cynical face and sneering tones seemed singularly out of place in the quiet little churchyard, whither, to her knowledge, he had never come before. She would almost as soon have expected to see him in the church itself. It has been said of another gentleman with a scientific turn that he would "peep and botanize upon his mother's grave," but it is probable that Dr. Bilde would have dug her up and dissected her without the smallest scruple. The idea of eavesdropping did not occur to Mary in connection with him, not because she did not think him base enough, but because no motive for it suggested itself to her mind; but the recollection of her own last words (not to mention that "Hush, hush, for Heaven's sake!" of her companion) did make her not a little uneasy.

If he had heard them, whether by accident or design, they could hardly have escaped his attention, and she was almost sure he had heard them. Mary's mortification and annoyance were very great; and, if she had been at liberty to follow her own instincts, she would have been content to acknowledge the doctor's presence by a bow, and then left him to "meditate among the tombs" by himself. But the agonized and terrified expression of Mrs. Sotheran's face was an appeal she could not resist, and she resolved to take the doctor off the poor lady's hands, at whatever cost to herself. The consciousness that she could do so very easily made the task, however, no easier to her, but the reverse. She knew instinctively—though he had been always hostile in his manner to her, rather

than otherwise—that she had some sort of attraction for him; and she did not hesitate, for her companion's sake, to make use of it for the first time.

“We are looking at Sarah Dempster's epitaph,” Mary observed, as if in reply to the doctor's observation. “Your habits of hard work will scarcely permit you to sympathize with it, I fear.”

He came up to her at once and read the lines aloud, in his metallic voice.

“That last line, ‘I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever,’ is a bold one,” he remarked, “and might well incur Mr. Wells's orthodox reprobation.”

“But consider how the poor woman must have toiled and slaved in this life,” observed Mary.

“True; but where the sting lay was, that she toiled alone: the head-stone says, ‘Sarah Dempster, spinster.’ She was forty-five, which is my own age exactly; and all these years she had probably no one to sympathize with or assist her, which is my own case.”

“I should have thought you were the last person to need sympathy, or, if I may say so without offence, even to understand it,” said Mary, frankly.

“You may say anything to me without offence,” returned the doctor, in his usual measured tones. “I am sometimes disappointed with what I hear you say, but never offended. As to sympathy, in the common acceptation of the term, I confess I do not value it; it seems to me a method by which one nature strives to weaken another, at its own expense, by union; whereas the very intention of union is, or should be, an accession of strength.”

“Please remember, Dr. Bilde, that, as you told Mr. Hinton the other day, I am not a swimmer, and therefore should not be taken out of my depth.”

“You would swim very well, Miss Marvon, if you would only accept a little teaching,” said the doctor, gravely. “There is no woman I have ever met of whose intelligence I have so high an opinion.”

Mary made him a sweeping courtesy, with the object not so much of acknowledging his politeness as of having an excuse for turning half round, and discovering wheth-

er Mrs. Sotheran had made her escape. To her great relief she found that she had done so.

"If you imagine I paid you a compliment, Miss Marvon, you are mistaken," continued the man of science. "I would not do your noble nature such a wrong."

"I am afraid, Dr. Bilde, that you overrate my nature, or, rather, mistake it altogether for something that it is not."

"Pardon me; it is you yourself who mistake it. It has capabilities of which you do not guess, if you would but give them a fair chance—if only you would accept of instruction."

"Thank you, Dr. Bilde," said Mary, moving away towards Bank Cottage, as to the nearest harbor of refuge, "but my education is finished."

"Nay, Miss Marvon, it is not even begun. A day may come, perhaps, and at no distant date, when it may be more worth your while to listen to me—"

"Worth my while, Dr. Bilde?" There had been such an unmistakable menace in his tone that it was impossible to ignore it, and Mary Marvon was not a girl to be menaced. As she stood before him, with raised head and flashing eye, she disproved the poet's dictum, that the swan is born to be "the only graceful shape of scorn."

"I did not use the expression in a worldly sense," explained the doctor, earnestly. He would have even touched her shoulder with his hand, approvingly, had she not withdrawn herself out of reach. "You must not identify me with those sordid, grasping souls among whom we move down yonder. The time comes to every one of us, though sometimes too late, when it seems worth our while to be wise."

He lifted his hat in farewell as he spoke, for Mary was moving quickly away towards Bank Cottage. His words had altogether failed to mitigate her indignation, or to do away with the impression that he had meant to threaten her. Nay, the very fact of his having endeavored to excuse himself strengthened her conviction, because excuse and apology were so foreign to his tongue.

Of this, however, she said nothing to poor Mrs. Sotheran, whom she found disturbed enough at this meeting with

Dr. Bilde, already; only, instead of being indignant, as Mary was, she seemed almost out of her mind with terror.

"What on earth could the man mean by stealing after us in the churchyard like a cat?" said Mary.

"Don't say a cat, my dear," shuddered the widow: "the cat comes after mice. 'How can there be no shame,' you said, 'when one has a secret of which one dares not speak?' Heaven grant he did not hear you!"

"And what if he did hear me?" asked Mary, boldly.

"Oh, my dear, don't speak of it!" cried Mrs. Sotheran, wringing her hands with a passionate distress that, to the girl, seemed exaggerated, if not inexplicable. "Let us hope for the best, and try to forget it. Thank Heaven, here's Charley coming up the lane."

Charley, indeed, could not mend matters—could not even, with prudence, be informed that matters wanted mending—but it was a comfort to them both to see him. His pleasant face, however, did not look quite so bright as usual.

"I bring great news with me," he said, addressing his mother, but with a significant glance at Mary, as though the news affected her rather than Mrs. Sotheran. "Mr. Rennie has arrived."

"I am so glad!" cried Mary, clapping her hands.

"I dare say you are," said Charley, viciously, "but you needn't show that you are glad. I call it positively indelicate."

"What do you mean?" inquired Mary. "Why should I not be glad that Mr. Rennie has come? He has been a very good friend to me, and I like him immensely."

"That is what I call 'owdacious!'" exclaimed Charley, holding up his hands; "a most striking instance of that description of gratitude which is defined as the sense of favors to come. Is it possible you don't know what he's come about?"

"How on earth should I know?"

"Here's an unconscious Miss Kilmansegg! You understand, at all events, mother, why Mr. Rennie has come down to Letcombe? He has been here often enough on the same errand."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" gasped Mrs. Sotheran. "I suppose it's a new will."

"Well, of course it is, and Mary here is to have a million."

"How can you talk such nonsense, Charley?" cried Mary, laughing.

"Well, of course I may be wrong as to the exact sum, but I only repeat what everybody else is saying. The flutter among the Happy Family down yonder is something beyond precedent. Even Dr. Bilde, whom I have just met, and who is sure of his codicil, seemed immensely interested, and turned back to the Hall, instead of going for his usual constitutional, in hopes, I suppose, to pick up some crumbs. I asked Mr. Nayler whether he thought Mr. Rennie was a presentment, or a flesh-and-blood solicitor, and you have no idea how angry he was."

"How can you be so foolish, Charley, as to make enemies of all these people?" observed Mary, reprovingly. "They may do you a bad turn some day."

"Enemies!" replied Charley, comically; "why, they are very dear friends of mine; or, at least, they were until just now. This news, I suppose, has put them a little off their heads. I did but ask Mr. Marks, apropos of Mr. Rennie's arrival, whether personal property, and how to dispose of it, was to be found in the 'categories,' and he immediately lost his temper. I never heard him express himself so concisely before."

"I am afraid you must have said something to anger Mr. Marks very much," said Mary. "You seemed such a favorite of his. It is a great pity to quarrel with any one."

"There couldn't have been a quarrel," pleaded Charley, "because it takes two to make one; and I was as cool as a cucumber throughout. At first, more like a physician than a metaphysician, he gave me some most excellent advice, and, at parting, what vulgar people call a piece of his mind, which, when one considers that he has none too much of it himself, was, as I told him, a very generous act."

Mary looked very serious; nor was her distress alleviated by Mrs. Sotheran's whispered assurance that if dear

Charley had quarrelled with Mr. Marks she might depend upon it that it was on her (Mary's) account.

"I shall go down to the Hall at once," said Mary. "I am sure there is mischief going on there, which may mean trouble to dear Mrs. Paton."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Mrs. Sotheran, fervently.

"If Miss Kilmansegg will graciously condescend to accept of my escort," said Charley, "I'll go with her. May I, Mary?"

"If you promise not to talk nonsense, you may, sir."

As soon as they were alone together the young man became serious enough. He was not to be shaken, however, in his conviction that Mr. Rennie had been sent for upon Mary's account, and described the excitement at the Hall as something portentous.

"I most sincerely hope and trust, Charley, that you are quite mistaken," said Mary.

"So do I," returned Charley. "I should be unworthy the name of man—which is a synonym for selfishness—if I didn't."

"Why so?"

"Because, if you are to have a million, or even half a million, you will be 'in a cloud of gold, on a throne,' no more to be approached by humble mortals such as myself."

"How can you be so silly? I don't believe one word of such rubbish. But why should Mr. Paton think of leaving me anything at all?"

"Nay, I can't blame him for that: in his place I should do the same, only much more so. I should order a waggon and fill it with title-deeds, and scrips, and shares for you at once; only, just as you were driving away with them, I should say, 'Hi! you have forgotten something; it is not of much consequence, but won't you take me into the bargain?'"

"I thought you promised me not to talk nonsense, sir."

"Quite true: I acknowledge it would be a very foolish proposition," said Charley, humbly, and heaving a little sigh. "Here is the grand almoner coming up the hill to meet you."

It was certainly the fact that the lawyer was approaching them from the Hall; and, from the manner in which

he raised his hat to Mary, she felt an uneasy presentiment that she was the object of his mission.

CHAPTER XL.

MR. RENNIE'S LITTLE MISTAKE.

THERE was a sadness in Charley's "Good-bye, Mary," as he quitted her side and plunged into the shrubbery, before Mr. Rennie could bring his glasses to bear upon him, that seemed to give that gentleman's approach an additional significance; while the expression of the lawyer's face as he drew near betokened that he was the bearer of some important tidings. For the first time Mary began to think that there was really something of truth in Charley's wild words, and the idea was very far from giving her pleasure. Secure of the affection of Mrs. Paton, and living for the most part in her society, life at the Hall had been on the whole agreeable to her. None of the members of the Happy Family were, however, to her taste; and what made them most objectionable to her were the greed and expectation with which they almost without exception regarded their host-patron. She was utterly unconscious of having already excited their jealousy or apprehension, but she foresaw that if it indeed were true that Mr. Paton entertained any beneficial design in her favor, she would very speedily incur them. She felt she had no claim upon his bounty, nor (notwithstanding her experience of the ills of poverty) did she seem to herself to deserve it. Far from being one of those natures with whom material advantage compensates for everything, even to the loss of self-respect, she would have been unwilling to accept it, burdened with the envy of a single fellow-creature.

The lawyer's greeting was very cordial. In answer to her inquiries he informed her that his health was tolerable, but that in business affairs he was unprosperous, on account of the loss of his chief copying-clerk. His countenance was so admirably preserved that for the moment

she was deceived, and only expressed a puzzled condolence. Then the corners of his mouth began to twinkle, and she perceived that he was referring to her own professional services.

"Oh," she said, "you mean the type-writer?"

"To be sure I do. Do you suppose we do not miss you at the office?"

"I can do some work for you now, if you are very hard pressed," she answered, smiling. "The machine is here."

"If Mr. Paton knew of it I fear he would set you to work with it. He makes a will a week or so, in ever so many folios."

"I don't want to have anything to do with his will," said Mary.

"That is monstrous, Miss Mary, and, in an inhabitant of Letcombe Hall, even unnatural. What do people come here for except to be in Mr. Paton's will?"

"You are rather sweeping in your judgment, Mr. Rennie," said Mary, with ever so little of a flush. "Do you suppose that Lady Orr, for example, wants Mr. Paton's money?"

"To be sure, I had forgotten Lady Orr. She wishes, no doubt, that she had had less money rather than more, poor woman. And there's her St. Bernard, Alexander. I admit that neither of them wishes to be a legatee."

"Well, surely Mr. Ralph Dornay has no ambition of that sort?"

"Indeed, I don't say that; he has no expectation, but I should say he had a very considerable ambition. It is difficult to choke a dog with pudding."

"I am afraid his wife is very unhappy," said Mary, gently.

"Of course she is, being what the gentlemen of my profession who are connected with the criminal branch of it term 'a lifer.' Great as is her punishment, however, it is hardly greater than the folly she committed. Marriages may be made in heaven originally, but I am inclined to think, after the first two or three, that they are turned out in another place. This third one of Mrs. Beckett's certainly was. By-the-bye, Miss Mary, that is the very sub-

ject I am come out to talk to you about—though not, I am sorry to say, at first hand. It is a commission. Do you happen to be thinking of marrying anybody, my dear young lady?"

"What a question!" exclaimed Mary, with a blush and a laugh.

"Just so. If I were not such an old friend, you are thinking to yourself, it would be almost a rude one."

"I think, Mr. Rennie, that you are incapable of a rudeness," put in Mary.

"I am more obliged to you for that assurance than I can express," pursued the lawyer, earnestly. "I am most fortunate in finding you alone. Would you mind stepping into the shrubbery—there is a seat yonder, if I remember right—so that we can speak together without fear of interruption? You have good sense as well as good feeling, my dear young lady, and you will understand that in what I am about to say I am only obeying the instructions of a very uncommon sort of client. If his object was not to benefit you I should certainly not be his intermediary in this matter; but he was averse to speak of it (as he well might be) with his own lips, and I flattered myself that, since it must needs be broached, it would be less distasteful from those of an old friend. I need scarcely tell you that I speak on behalf of Mr. Beryl Paton. Since you have been here so long, you can hardly be surprised at any eccentricity on Mr. Paton's part. His impulses, though more rapid than his prejudices, are not less vehement, while in carrying them into effect he knows not the meaning of the word 'impossible.' You must promise me, my dear Miss Mary, that as you will not be astonished so you will not be angered by anything he has made it my task to say to you."

"I will do my best, Mr. Rennie, to behave as you would wish," said Mary, gently; "but I confess you a little alarm me."

"There is no necessity for alarm. All that you need is to know your own mind," said the lawyer, impressively. "It will not be moved, if I have read it aright, by any considerations of advantage to do your woman's heart a wrong. I am not expressing myself as I would wish, Miss

Mary. If I were drawing up your marriage settlement I should feel more at home."

"There is nothing amiss in your choice of words," said Mary, in a low tone. "Since you must needs do so, pray go on."

"It is something that the court, so far, is with me. Mr. Paton has taken it into his head that, with a slight effacement of time, if not of space, he can make two lovers happy. You are one of them."

"I!"

"Certainly. You first and the other afterwards. The feminine in this case is much more worthy than the masculine. The fact is, Mr. Paton has taken an immense liking to you, my dear Miss Mary, for which I do not blame him in the least; but, as always happens when he has conceived an affection for any one, he wishes to take matters out of the hands of Providence and to arrange them himself."

"That is to say, I suppose," said Mary, quietly, "that I am to be made happy after his own fashion, or that I am not to be happy at all?"

"No," replied Mr. Rennie, quickly; "to do Mr. Paton justice, this is not a question of accepting his benevolence or losing his favor. I wish you particularly to understand that. You are altogether a free agent. I have, it is true, a guerdon in one hand, but I have no menace in the other. That is a position in which I am, unhappily, often placed, but no consideration on earth would induce me to approach you with a menace. I asked you just now whether you were thinking of marrying anybody: a question, I perceive, not to be answered. Still, the interests affected by your reply are so enormous that I am bound to be importunate. Let me put it, with all respect and delicacy, and in the strictest confidence, another way. Is there any one under Mr. Paton's roof who, you have reason to believe, is attached to you, and whose affection, if declared, you think it possible you might reciprocate?"

The question would have been an embarrassing and even a distressing one to any young woman, but to Mary it was peculiarly so. She confessed to herself that there was such a person at Letcombe Hall; but as she had until

lately experienced no such feeling towards him, and had even forbidden him to speak of love to her, how could she entertain the possibility of becoming his wife, or even speculate on such a matter to a third person? She therefore remained silent.

"Let me make it easier for you," said Mr. Rennie, gently. "Is there not a young gentleman under yonder roof who at one time flattered himself with the hope of securing you, and whom only the consciousness, or the impression, that there is no hope prevents from continuing his attentions?"

To this most young ladies in Mary's position would have replied, if they had made reply at all, "There may be." It was characteristic of that young lady that she answered more directly, though in hesitating and unwilling accents, "Yes, there is."

"So I have been given to understand," said the lawyer, gravely. "Now, supposing that this young gentleman should be encouraged to renew his suit, is there any reasonable hope that he would meet with better success with you? Do not distress yourself by answering me, Miss Mary," put in the lawyer, after a little pause: "your truthful face gives your reply. Since I have obtained it there is now no harm in telling you the great things that are in store for you. It was my duty, perhaps, to have spoken of them earlier, but I well knew they would not affect your choice; and it is right to add that, since the young gentleman in question is no better informed upon the matter than yourself, they can in no way have affected his."

Into Mary's blushing face there stole a little smile, which seemed to say, "That is an assurance which I did not require."

"It is Mr. Paton's intention to make your husband an allowance of £2000 a year, and to secure to you absolutely, by will, a sum of money, of which it is, perhaps, only necessary to say that it is of very considerable amount. My word for that," he added, in reply to a puzzled look on Mary's face, "is sufficient, is it not? Or do you want the details?"

"My dear Mr. Rennie," exclaimed Mary, without paying attention to this last remark, which, indeed, she did

not even hear, "your proposition is so amazing to me from first to last that I can hardly believe I am not dreaming. If I could see the slightest reason for this extraordinary munificence I should be better able to acknowledge it."

"Reason? That is the very last thing you will get from Beryl Paton. But I may tell you, for your comfort, that I have known him do much stranger things."

"Is Mrs. Paton aware of these intentions?" inquired Mary, earnestly.

"It is very unlikely. Her husband is not communicative to her on matters of business."

"Then, without her approval, Mr. Rennie, beyond expressing my deep sense of Mr. Paton's unexampled generosity, which exceeds alike my desires and my merits, I can make you no reply to his princely offer."

It was characteristic of the girl, and impressed the lawyer very much, that the brilliant prospect thus suddenly unfolded to her gaze, while it naturally astonished, had failed to dazzle her. It was not the first time by many that it had fallen to his lot to inform persons of some great and unexpected prosperity, and the effect had been always rapture unalloyed by scruple. The notion now conveyed to him by Mary's behavior was, that the object of her choice was not a favorite with Mrs. Paton, and he seized upon the opportunity (which, indeed, he had long desired) to speak a word of warning.

"My dear young lady, it is to the last degree unlikely, from what I know of your hostess, that she will stir a finger to oppose your happiness. On the contrary, even if she has objections, she will rather stretch a point and waive them in order to secure it. This is a matter that can only be settled by your own inclinations. If you are sure of them, well and good; if you are not sure—still more, if you have secret doubts of the man to whom you are about to intrust your future—you will—I hardly know how to speak of such a thing without offence, and I know it sounds like an address to a jury—but you will give yourself the benefit of them."

"As to that, I am quite sure I have no doubts," said Mary, smiling faintly.

“Very good,” replied the lawyer, though the expression of his face was even graver than before. “It is not in my instructions, and, indeed, would be directly contrary to the spirit of them, to suggest impediments. You will have a bridegroom as handsome as his fortune; and there is this to be said, that the connection will draw you still nearer to an old friend of yours, whose friendship is worth having—Lady Orr.”

“Yes,” said Mary, smiling as a woman smiles when she is speaking of those who appreciate the man she loves; “it is a great pleasure to me that Lady Orr is so fond of Charley.”

“Fond of who?” said the lawyer, forgetting his grammar in his astonishment. “Did you say ‘Charley’?”

“I have always called him Charley,” admitted Mary, softly. “If—if matters should turn out as you have proposed, there will be nothing to wish altered, I am sure, as regards Lady Orr.”

“Oh, well, I don’t know much about such things,” said the lawyer. “I suppose, as any stick will do to beat a dog with, any term of affection comes handy to indicate the beloved object; but as a matter of fact, and as I’ve got it down in my instructions, the young gentleman’s name is Edgar.”

“Edgar!” exclaimed Mary, turning scarlet. “Do you mean Mr. Edgar Dornay?”

“Why, who on earth else should it be? Good gracious! what have I done?” for the blood had left the young girl’s cheeks as quickly as it had rushed into them. “My dear Miss Mary, I am sure that a sensible young woman like you is never going to faint. For my sake—for Heaven’s sake—don’t faint!”

Even the lawyer’s agonized appeal might have failed to restore Mary to herself had not her pride come to her aid.

“There has been some terrible mistake,” she murmured.

“But who else *is* there?” exclaimed Mr. Rennie. His eyes were open wider than they had ever been before, and yet he could not see where his error lay. “It isn’t one of the Happy Family surely? *Not* Mr. Marks, *not* Mr. Naylor; it can’t be Mr.—what’s-his-name—that lies so?”

“No, Mr. Rennie, indeed, it is none of those gentle-

men," gasped Mary, between a sob and a laugh. "It's Charley Sotheran."

"But I said the man was here, staying at the Hall."

"Well, Charley has been staying here these three weeks."

"Then why didn't that ridiculous old lunatic—that is to say, I mean my excellent client—vouchsafe to say so?" exclaimed the lawyer, with irritation. "How should I know? I was never placed in such a false position in the whole course of my life."

Mary answered nothing, but perhaps her face said, "And the position you have placed *me* in is not a very pleasant one for a young lady to find herself," for her companion continued, in a less vehement tone, "It is one of the disadvantages flowing from an imperial policy that, even when these high-handed gentry intend to do good, they as often as not do harm, from not taking into account the feelings and desires of other people. I owe you an apology, my dear young lady, for having precipitated matters—for that is the worst that can happen—with Charley."

"Good heavens! you will not do anything so outrageous as to tell him, Mr. Rennie?" exclaimed Mary, in consternation.

"Of course not—of course not," replied the lawyer, with a promptness in itself not a little suspicious; and, in point of fact, the notion of telling Charley had at once occurred to him, as the most obvious means of reparation for his mistake. "The secret shall be your own—as long as you can keep it. Yes, yes; and I shall take care that Charley's interests, since they are also yours, shall take no hurt from this little apprehension. I have been made a fool of, but I will not be made a tool of; and though you may not be made an heiress, you shall get something out of the fire."

"Indeed, Mr. Rennie," put in Mary, earnestly, "I beg you will not dream of making any application to Mr. Patton upon my account."

"Very good: that is as you please, young lady. What I shall say to him, then, will be upon *my* account. Business is business. To have been sent upon a fool's errand like this is not what I bargained for. However, I have

one consolation, Miss Mary, which buoys me up : I'll add it to the bill."

In spite of Mary's distress of mind, which was considerable, she could not repress a smile at the old lawyer's indignation, and at his self-suggested means of mitigating it. In his case, whatever conflagration arose in the way of trouble and misapprehension, it was clear the fire-engines were always on the spot. The very idea of a fat bill of costs seemed at once to soothe him and turn his thoughts into a kindly channel.

"There is one thing, Miss Mary, in this unfortunate affair," he continued, "which, if you will allow me to say so, gives me genuine satisfaction. I am very glad that it is Charley. It is true, I don't know much about him, but I am a believer in the doctrine of averages, and the odds are that he's a better fellow than Edgar. He mayn't be much to look at—I beg pardon, I mean so handsome as the other—wrong again, am I?" and, indeed, the expression of his companion's face most unmistakably showed that there were two opinions on these points. "What a precious mess I'm making of it!" exclaimed poor Mr. Rennie, wiping his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief. "If I don't put it at three figures, may I be struck off the Rolls! What I wish to say, Miss Mary, without prejudice (there, now I'm at home again), is, that handsome is as handsome does; and you will do me the justice to say that, while dwelling on the personal advantages of Mr. Edgar Dornay, I never uttered one word of recommendation of him. As he is my client no longer, I am free to confess that I think you have done very wisely. I don't know why it is that a devotion to music, poetry, and the fine arts should always make a man so infernally selfish, but so it is; and Mr. Edgar Dornay is, in my opinion, no exception in his worship of Number One."

Here Mary looked so grave and pained that the lawyer came to a full stop. Had he known more of Charley he would willingly have praised him; but, as it was, his means of conciliation—or what he thought would have the effect of conciliating—were confined to the depreciation of Edgar.

"I have nothing more to say, Miss Mary," he added,

“save to express my regret—and my felicitations. If I could do anything to atone for my involuntary error—”

“You can be silent, Mr. Rennie,” put in Mary, significantly. “Then the only person who will have suffered from your indiscretion will be myself.”

With that she made him rather a ceremonious courtesy, and resumed her way to the Hall. Upon the whole, if it could not be said that she did well to be angry, it was certainly no wonder that she was annoyed at what had happened. No young lady likes the expression of her love to be wrung from her by a third person, and especially by mistake: it is one of the things she looks forward to to tell that precious secret to the beloved object with her own lips, and Mr. Rennie had possessed himself of it, though, it is true, involuntarily, under false pretences. On the other hand, the lawyer by no means considered Mary to be the sole person aggrieved. “The only person that will have suffered!” he echoed, indignantly, as he watched her moving slowly, not to say haughtily, through the trees. “Upon my life she’s a cool hand. It is my experience that girls always *are* cool, except on those very matters in which it most behooves them to keep their heads. The only person! As if the false position in which I have been placed—a respectable solicitor, acting upon the most absurd instructions—was to count for nothing! How was I to know that it was Charley, and not Edgar, unless, indeed, I ought to have taken it for granted that that wonderful client of mine was making some confounded mistake? Then who could doubt that it was Edgar, even from what the girl said herself? ‘Is there any one under Mr. Paton’s roof,’ I asked, ‘who, you have reason to believe, is attached to you?’ And again, ‘Is there not a young gentleman who once flattered himself with the hope of winning you?’ And to each of those questions she answered ‘Yes.’ So it seems that both these young men have asked her to marry them, and are prepared to ask her again. Do they always do it twice, I wonder? If so,” added the lawyer, grimly, “I can only say that I have done my best to restore the average by never having done it at all.”

CHAPTER XII.

"ENGAGED."

At the court of the French king the position of a person at table was an index of his rising fortunes, and the nearer he was placed to the royal transparency the nearer he seemed to be to heaven. It was the same in some sort at Letcombe Hall; and certain changes at the dinner-table, on the day of Mary's interview with Mr. Rennie, filled the minds of the guests with speculation. By virtue of his office Mr. Paton's physician always filled the chair at his left hand, while the right, unless any special reason—always set down to favoritism—arose for other arrangements, was usually occupied by the last comer. For many days Mr. Ralph Dornay had sat there without much arousing the common envy; he had failed to improve his opportunities as his host's next neighbor; and, indeed, it was pretty well understood that Mr. Paton only tolerated him out of regard to Lady Orr. Under other circumstances Mr. Rennie would now have succeeded him, when, lo and behold! when the company took their places, Mr. Edgar Dornay held that coveted place. It was almost as significant as though Mr. Paton had laid his hand upon the young man's head and announced in public "This is my heir;" but then he had made so many heirs, not one of whom had succeeded to a sixpence. Moreover, the attention of the guests—in other words, their envy, hatred, and malice—was attracted in another direction; for Mr. Charles Sotheran now occupied Edgar's place by Mary's side. This also, it was felt, was symbolical of much, and aroused an equal apprehension. Considering the learning and philosophy in which so many of the party were wrapped, it was amazing how prompt they were to comprehend the circumstances; and, indeed, the only person who did not understand them was Mr. Charles Sotheran

himself—a fact, however, which did not at all interfere with his thorough enjoyment.

“Now, I call this nice,” he murmured, as he dropped into the arm-chair—they were all arm-chairs in the Letcombe dining-room—indicated to him by the major-domo; and, as Mary did not contradict him, it is probable that the new arrangement did not displease her. To have sat next to Edgar after Mr. Rennie’s revelation to her would, at all events, have been most embarrassing, and even as matters stood they were rather trying. Not a word had escaped her lips to any one as to what had happened that morning, but she had no means of guessing how much others knew; and that something was known or guessed was obvious to her. Mrs. Paton’s manner to her was even more affectionate than usual, Lady Orr’s more cordial, and that of her host more significant than all. Once he caught her eye and raised his champagne-glass, while his fine face seemed to glow, not only with good-will, but with a certain tender forgiveness. “I have been mistaken,” it seemed to say, “and I am sorry; but though you have declined my road to happiness, I hope you will reach it by some other way.” Indeed, he even glanced at her next neighbor, as much as to say, “*That way.*”

“I hope there is a great deal to eat,” said Charley, as he inspected the *menu*.

“I call that very greedy, sir.”

“You are right, as you always are,” he answered. “I should like to sit here for ever and ever.”

Mrs. Welbeck, who sat on the other side of him, though partial to her food, thought this sentiment a little exaggerated, and appealed to Miss Parks about it.

“Mr. Sotheran says that he should like to eat for ever and ever.”

“How like a man!” replied that social philosopher; “their aspirations are always of the earth, earthy. For my part, I hold dinner, like war, to be a necessary evil.”

“Oh, dear! I think that is going much too far in the other direction,” said Mrs. Welbeck, regarding the slice of salmon that had just been placed before her with all the rapture of anticipation. “We are told in the Bible to take a little wine for our—I mean, medicinally—and to

enjoy—though for my part I can never digest a pear—the kindly fruits of the earth.”

“Such matters do not concern me,” said Miss Parks, contemptuously. “I am thankful to say my motto is *Ad astra*.”

“If it was mine I wouldn’t mention it,” muttered Mrs. Welbeck, who was not classical. “The idea of a woman at her time of life having ‘Led astray’ for her motto! What are you laughing at, Mr. Sotheran? Nothing! I wish I could laugh at nothing. ‘Laugh,’ they say, ‘and grow fat,’ because it is healthy. Yet Mr. Ralph Dornay yonder is very fat, and never laughs at all.”

At that particular moment Mr. Ralph Dornay was certainly not laughing. He was furious at having been deposed by his nephew, and still more furious at seeing Charley placed next to Mary. Once or twice he looked across, doubtless for sympathy, to Dr. Bilde, and found none. That gentleman was going through his dinner with that methodical enjoyment peculiar to members of his profession, who, while warning others of the dangers of the table, seem to pluck from them the flower, safety. (Is it, I wonder, that their skill holds them harmless, or that, since “hawks do not peck out hawks’ een,” they know they can be cured for nothing?) On the present occasion, indeed, the doctor seemed even better satisfied with himself and the ways of “order” than usual. Perhaps, knowing that his codicil was secure, the legatorial anxieties which were obviously consuming those about him were not without their charms for him: the pleasures of advantageous comparison are, with certain natures, always enjoyable.

Messrs. Marks and Naylor had no such consolation. These philosophers had long ceased to flatter themselves that the broad domains and rich investments of Mr. Beryl Paton would fall to them *en bloc*. On the first revelation of their systems to their host and patron, they may, indeed, have entertained ambitious dreams, but of late years they had confined their expectations to mere “pickings”—the thousands, or perhaps tens of thousands, that form the fringe of a great estate, and, when not swallowed up by that rapacious monster the residuary legatee, fall, like

the precious dew from heaven, upon judicious outsiders. The elevation, therefore, of Edgar Dornay to a place so near the throne (which, besides, was not unexpected) was by no means so distasteful to them as the new distribution of Mr. Paton's lesser favors. It was clear to them that he had given his sanction to Charley's addresses to Mary, and that henceforth there would be a coalition of interests between those two young people. "What is enough for one is enough for two" is a very pretty proverb, and exceedingly encouraging to folks about to marry; but, as a matter of fact, Mary's claims upon Mr. Paton would certainly be more considerable as a bride than in her former position. It seemed to them, in short, that she was about to be dowered at their (prospective) expense; and, what was the bitterest reflection of all, their successful rival, Charley, would have a share in the robbery! Mary had been quite correct in supposing that Charley had not only lost the favor, but incurred the enmity, of both these gentlemen; but she did not know that she herself had been the cause of quarrel. It had always been difficult for the young man to restrain his indignation when they had been wont to speak of her in his presence in their philosophic manner; but the arrival of Mr. Rennie—which, as they justly concluded, betokened the advancement of her fortunes with Mr. Paton—had stung them into "saying things" of that young lady which were not only unphilosophic, but unparliamentary. Curiously enough, they had taken the same view, though from very different standpoints, with regard to the effect of her prosperity, as Charley himself—namely, that it would place her so high above his reach as at once to extinguish his pretensions to her; and, judging his feelings from what their own would have been under similar circumstances, they counted upon his sympathy with their plain speaking. The result was so deplorable that it would be painful to describe, and impossible, if we retained Charley's words, to print it.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the dinner-table conversation languished, and that Mr. Hindon found his opportunities of agreeing with everybody uncommonly few. In the drawing-room things were but little better, though Charley, who took his seat by Mary

as a matter of course, never noticed that there was a screw loose; on the contrary, that tendency to yawn which sometimes besets a young gentleman over the tea and toast was entirely absent, and he thought it a most charming evening.

The climax of his satisfaction, however, was yet to come. When the ladies retired Mrs. Paton whispered that she had a word to say to him in her boudoir, to which he repaired with a most commendable promptness. His hostess received him with a most benevolent smile, which had, nevertheless, a touch of sadness in it. She could not help reflecting, perhaps, that, had not fate ordered it otherwise, she might have been about to confer happiness upon a son of her own. Nevertheless, Charley was dear to her, and the son of her dearest friend.

"My dear boy," she said, with a gentle gravity, "it is my mission to tell you that Mary Marvon has somewhat disappointed my husband as regards a certain scheme he had proposed to himself for her future benefit. It was his hope that she would have formed a union with Edgar Dornay, who, as you know, is a great favorite of his, and who in other respects would have been a very eligible suitor; but from certain information which has reached him to-day, and into which it is not necessary to enter, Mr. Paton has come to the conclusion that such a match would be distasteful to her; that there is, in short, an obstacle to it. Can you enlighten me as to what it is?"

Charley was not given to blushing. "I am modest, but not shy," was the account he was wont to give of himself—and as to the shyness he was certainly correct—but on the present occasion he blushed like a blush-rose.

"I should imagine, from what I know of her character, that if Miss Marvon declines to marry Mr. Dornay it is because she doesn't like him," he answered, simply.

"But that is only a negative objection, sir. My husband's apprehension is that Mary is in love with somebody else."

"That is a question, my dear Mrs. Paton," he replied, "which I cannot venture to answer;" and this time Charley blushed like a peony.

"I rather thought you might have ventured," said Mrs.

Paton, dryly; "it has struck me once or twice that you had rather a fancy for her yourself."

"There you have wronged me, madam," said the young man, with a gravity that became his pleasant face exceedingly. "It is no fancy that I have for Mary Marvon, but a love that will last my life."

"And is Mary herself aware of this?"

"Oh, yes, it cannot but be so; but she has forbidden me to speak of it."

"I see," returned Mrs. Paton, smiling. It struck her that there were other ways of hinting at devotion than by speech, and that this young man had not refrained from using them. "Still, though you may imagine that you know your own mind upon this matter, you know very little of Mary—about her antecedents, for example—"

"My dear madam, such things may be interesting to Professor Parks," put in Charley, impatiently, "but where Mary comes from I care nothing. All that is of consequence to me is, that she is *here*, and I am always wondering at it, for she seems more fit for heaven."

"But, Charley," said Mrs. Paton, in slow and sorrowful tones, "there is another thing which it is my duty to tell you: neither my husband nor Mr. Rennie is aware of it, but whosoever seeks to be Mary's husband must know it—Mary is illegitimate."

"If I was in the Registrar's Office that might have some interest for me," said Charley, dryly, "but, as it happens, I am in the Probate Office. The incident appears to me to belong to another generation, and does not affect me in the slightest degree."

If Mr. Paton could have heard Charley speak those words and seen the look of scorn which was their fit accompaniment, it would have shaken Edgar Dornay upon his throne, for no sentiment could have pleased the master of Letcombe Hall so well. His wife, indeed, was almost as much gratified, though from quite another cause.

"You are a true lover, Charley," she exclaimed, admiringly. Then she knocked at the door which communicated with her own bedroom, and from it there issued Mary herself. The girl looked very pale and quiet, like

one prepared for any fate; and though, on catching sight of Charley, the color rushed to her cheeks, the next moment her eyes turned with earnest steadfastness to Mrs. Paton.

"I have fulfilled my mission, my darling," said that lady, tenderly; then, turning to Charley, she continued: "It was imposed upon me, as you know, by Mr. Paton, and not by this young lady, who, having forbidden you to speak of love, could hardly, indeed, have ignored her own veto. From what I know of both your hearts, you may speak now."

"Mary knows I love her," said Charley, softly; "she has always known it."

For one fleeting instant the expression of trust and tenderness in Charley's face was reflected in Mary's own; then she turned again to Mrs. Paton and whispered, tremulously, "Does he know all—all that his mother told you?"

Mrs. Paton nodded assent. It seemed as if that nod had been some ingenious piece of mechanism which released two expectant bodies and caused them to rush into one another's arms.

"This precipitation, my dears," observed the old lady, in tones of amused reproof, "is, for all you know, the very height of imprudence. If, as I must needs conclude, you consider yourselves affianced to one another, does it not strike you that, as a married couple, you will have very little to live upon?"

"What I dote upon," observed Charley, with roguish gravity, "is a long engagement."

"In the present case that is out of the question, sir. In whatever he has resolved upon my husband is impatient of delay, and it is his wish that you young people should be married almost immediately."

"Rather than disoblige Mr. Paton," said Charley, promptly, "I will sacrifice myself at the altar to-morrow."

"It will not be so soon as that, sir, but it will be very soon. A certain allowance will be made to you by my husband on your marriage, and be continued during pleasure. I am quite confident that it will never be forfeited by any misconduct of your own, my dears; but, as you

are not without your enemies, and it is possible that Mr. Paton's ear may be abused, I have requested Mr. Rennie to settle (should occasion arise for it, or in case of my demise) a little money of my own upon you; not much, indeed, for I have not much to give, but enough to keep the wolf from the door. No, no, don't thank me," she added, hurriedly; "don't speak of it. My drops, Mary."

With those words, uttered with feeble haste, Mrs. Paton had fallen back in her chair, with a face so ghastly and significant of mental agony that poor Charley, a moment before almost beside himself with joy and gratitude, was frozen with horror, believing that his benefactress was about to die. Mary, however, had found the remedy for which the patient had inquired, and applied it on the instant, and in a minute or two consciousness and speech returned.

"I did not need this warning for myself," she murmured, "but it will prove to you, my dears, how uncertain is my hold on life. Mr. Rennie must bestir himself at once to give effect to my wishes."

Mary threw herself on her knees and besought her hostess not to disturb her mind with anxieties on her account.

"If we could but see you well, my dear Mrs. Paton, there would be nothing wanting to complete the happiness you have conferred upon us."

"Would that it *were* conferred, dear girl!" was her unexpected rejoinder. "What little span of life remains to me I would gladly give, could I thereby insure it. Though the sun seems to shine on you to-day, the sky is full of clouds that threaten all of us. To part from you will be pain indeed, yet I would that you were already in some little home with Charley. So long as you remain beneath this roof every breath you draw is perilous, every step you take is over pitfalls. I would warn you of them, but I dare not— Hush, hush! is there not some one in my room?"

Mary stepped in quickly and examined the apartment. She, too, had fancied that she had heard the rustle of a dress close to the half-open door. But her search con-

vinced her that she had been mistaken. Mrs. Paton's alarm seemed also to have subsided, for, having dismissed Charley with a maternal embrace, she declined Mary's offer to share her apartment for the night.

"To have you near me, my dear, is a temptation such as you cannot guess," she said, in trembling tones; "but there is danger in it to us both."

"What danger?" inquired Mary, wonderingly.

"Nay, you must not ask me that," sighed the old lady, with a strange, fond look, which was at the time inexplicable to the girl. "There is danger in your asking why. There is danger everywhere—both to you and to me."

CHAPTER XLII.

ROSE-COLORED.

It was characteristic of Mr. Beryl Paton, and of his rôle of Deputy Providence, that he himself never uttered one word respecting his good intentions to the two young people whom he desired to benefit. They were given to understand by Mr. Rennie that any expression of gratitude on their part would even be resented. There were many who had cause (or thought they had) to be disappointed with Beryl Paton as a patron, but no one could accuse him of a broken promise, for he never made one. There were hundreds who had reaped his favors, and were still reaping them, but they were all bestowed (as his wife expressed it) "during pleasure." Sometimes his own right hand was unconscious of what his left hand gave, sometimes Mr. Rennie was the depositary of the secret, and sometimes (when there seemed a necessity for it) the information was shared by one or two others. In the present case it would have been better for the objects of his generosity had it been made more public; or, rather, if its moderate limits, which rumor greatly exaggerated, had been understood. To some of the members of the Happy Family it seemed as though their all was in danger of being taken from them at the eleventh hour by these youth-

ful interlopers, who had borne none of the burden and heat of the day. To have tilled the field of expectation and sown it with the seed of subservience was no light labor, and to see the harvest reaped by hands that had done no stroke of work in that way was intolerable. Mr. Hindon alone could bring himself to congratulate Charley on his brilliant prospects, which (notwithstanding his own little attempt on Mary's heart) he did with much frankness and effusion. An ordinary marriage gift, he said, would not sufficiently express his sentiments, but if its distance from the Probate Office should not prove insuperable, and the young couple could arrange to live in the neighborhood of Great Grimsby, he had a house of his own there, the title-deeds of which it would give him sincere pleasure to make over to them on their wedding-day. Lady Orr's congratulations took a shape probably more sincere, and certainly more practical.

"My dear Mary," she said, "the good news I hear concerning you has been from the first, as you well know, the wish of my heart. I was Charley's advocate, remember, when you had not learned to so thoroughly appreciate him as you do now." It was amazing how she kept her countenance (and her color), considering the recollections which must surely have occurred to her when thus alluding to events that had happened in Park Lane; but a lady who has married three times is not easily "put out" by any association of ideas. "What I should like to do (and what I would have done, had you taken my advice when it was offered) would be to make you a really handsome dowry. There, you needn't look like that! As I am not going to do it you may surely permit me the cheap luxury of a generous intention. Circumstances have occurred"—here her brow grew dark—"which would make my now indulging myself in such a pleasure difficult."

There had been a stormy scene between Lady Orr and her husband concerning this very matter, of which Mary could not guess. He had forbidden his wife to spend her own money according to her own fancy. Nor was even that, though it must have humiliated her, the worst of it. In his hatred of these innocent young people he had been

so imprudent as to show the seamy side of his whole character to the woman who had hitherto, for her own sake, abstained from investigating it. She had been, indeed, conscious that there were seams, but its rents and rags and patches had been displayed and shaken menacingly in her face. The whole fabric of his nature had given way; not, like a woman's dress, "at the gathers," but in a manner which proved the stuff was rotten.

"I *could* do it," she went on, in a sort of passionate soliloquy, "and, if it should ever be essential to your happiness, I would do it; but it would be difficult."

"My dear Lady Orr, it distresses me exceedingly—" began poor Mary.

"That's my selfishness, my dear," put in the other, vehemently. "I ought to have known that it would distress you. Let us say no more about it. It annoys me, indeed, that I can only give you trinkets, but, such as they are, you know my love goes with them."

She drew from her bosom (it struck Mary with an icy horror that she had not dared to bring it openly in her hand) a jewel-case and handed it to Mary; as she did so the case flew open and, in displaying its contents, stopped Mary's thanks in the bud. She beheld a parure of diamonds, a necklace with pendant, and two bracelets, glittering like the sea in the sun.

"My dear Lady Orr, it is impossible," said the girl, stepping back from the tempting spectacle as though it had been some physical danger. "These diamonds must have cost a fortune. It is like your generosity to offer them, but consider how out of place they would look on me."

"Whom should they become better?" answered the other, impatiently. "It is your pride which rejects them, Mary, and prevents me from showing how much I love you."

"No, Lady Orr, it is not my pride," answered the girl, smiling, "but only my sense of proportion."

I am afraid neither lady was quite truthful, for in the case of the elder one, besides her love, there was a secret desire to make reparation; while the magnitude of the gift was in reality at the bottom of Mary's disinclination to accept it.

"It is a hard thing," said Lady Orr, bitterly, "that I cannot give you what I would, and that what I can give you will not accept from me."

"Do not say that, I implore you," pleaded Mary. "If you must needs give me something costly, give me the bracelet you wear every night—"

"I dare not," interrupted the other, quickly. Then, in answer to Mary's wondering look, she added, in a hoarse and terrible whisper, "He would be sure to miss it, and ask where it is gone. No, you shall have the pearls Sir Robert gave me. They will suit you best, for they are associated with nothing but love and honor; and, alas! they do not now suit *me*."

For the first time throughout her acquaintance with her Mary beheld Lady Orr in tears. They were so foreign to her character, or, rather, to the position she had so long occupied above the stabs of Fate, that the sight distressed her companion as much as a man's tears would have done.

"Do not weep for me, Mary," continued the other, vehemently; "forget that I have ever shown this weakness, or, if you remember it, do so as a memento that love and truth are all that are worth a woman's living for;" then, pressing her lips to the forehead of the frightened girl, she hurried out of the room.

It was understood, though no particular time was fixed for the marriage of the young couple, that it would take place at an early date, and in the meanwhile Mr. Rennie was very busy with deeds and parchments in a certain room that had been for years set apart to him at the Hall, and which Charley (little dreaming that he should ever have any concern with it) had been wont to term the Letcombe Probate Office. Prudence, as one cannot but have observed, was not a leading feature in Charley's character. He was not "as grave as a judge," nor were his utterances judicious. When a humorous idea struck him he expressed it, no matter what subject suggested itself to the play of fancy. It is one of the penalties men pay for the possession of humor, that it carries them away with it, like a runaway horse, and sometimes over the flower-beds or across the cucumber-frame. Nothing, as the dull folks maintain, is sacred from them, by which it is meant that

they are not even restrained by considerations of self-interest from having their joke. The character of Beryl Paton was one which in many points appealed to the best sympathies of the young government clerk; he had, indeed, a hearty regard and admiration for him, and, it need not be added, a very keen sense of his personal kindness; but he had said things of even Beryl Paton, in a good-tempered way, which were less reverential than amusing; and, what was worse, he had taken little heed as to who were his hearers. It was the nature of the young fellow to talk openly to everybody, and, unless he knew a man for a sneak and a tale-bearer, to take him for an honest man. This was an attribute of Charley's which recommended him to a few, but made him unpopular with that large class of persons who, not daring to be natural themselves, look upon naturalness in others as a liberty and an impertinence. And it alarmed the more cautious of his friends. Mrs. Sotheran, indeed, fairly trembled at her son's light talk and independent ways. As his mother she admired it, and was sometimes compelled to laugh at Charley's fun in spite of herself, but it was her private opinion that he had not the money for it.

"When you have ten thousand a year, my dear," she would sagely observe, "you may say what you like; but as it is you talk too freely."

To Charley, whose salary only increased at the rate of ten pounds per annum, it is not to be wondered at that this prospect of emancipation seemed so exceedingly remote that it was hardly worth regarding; yet he was by no means one of those young gentlemen who "despise their mother when she is old." Perhaps he had even an uneasy sense that she was right in this matter, but, at all events, he had striven to moderate the freedom of his tongue to please her. He might just as well have attempted to alter the color of his eyes.

It was not without some sense of triumph, therefore, as well as of blissful content, that he had brought her the news of his engagement to Mary Marvon, and of Mr. Beryl Paton's generous intentions towards them; and, indeed, in spite of their frank and independent ways, the young couple seemed to have done exceedingly well for

themselves. His mother folded him in her arms and expressed her joy in a flood of silent tears. So far nothing could be more natural or like herself; but he waited in vain for one word of congratulation. There was an expression of doubt and even alarm in her eyes, mingled with their love and thankfulness.

"Do you not believe me, mother?" he said. "Does my news seem too good to you to be true?"

"Yes," she answered, snatching eagerly at his suggestion, "that is it. I have not been accustomed to good tidings."

"For the rest of your life I hope things will be different, dear mother," he said. "Hitherto you have only known loss; to-day you have a daughter given to you."

"Not yet," she sighed, with a look like a hare who hears, or think she hears, the cry of the hounds. "'There is many a slip between the cup and the lip.'"

Charley smiled and kissed her. It was not very cheerful to be received in this Cassandra style; but he was accustomed to his mother's ways, and always very patient and tender with her. "We must all die, my dear, if you mean that," he said; "but nothing short of death will now separate me and Mary."

"I hope not; I trust not," she murmured. "But you tell me that Mr. Paton has not yet spoken to Mary. Does not that seem strange?"

"To me it seems uncommonly strange," said Charley, "especially since, under the circumstances, he might even expect a kiss. Mr. Rennie leads me to imagine (though that's a secret) that Mr. Paton means to allow Mary £500 a year."

"And Mr. Paton has not spoken to his wife about all this."

"Well, I don't know why you should have assumed that, but so it is. Of course, such behavior is peculiar. When I am Mary's husband I shall tell her everything I think will interest her. But then Mr. Paton *is* peculiar. If he has chosen to make Mr. Rennie his intermediary, what is that to us?"

"But there will be investigations—inquiries?"

"Mrs. Paton and I have had a talk together," said

Charley, gravely, "and everything has been said that needs to be said. She has told me about Mary's parentage, and all that. If the—well, what you have in your mind—doesn't matter to *me*, how on earth should it matter to Mr. Paton? Come, come, don't take such gloomy views, mother, on the brightest day that has ever dawned on me. We are to be married from the Hall, Mr. Rennie tells me, and Mr. Paton himself is to give Mary away; only think of that!"

It was probable that Mrs. Sotheran thought a good deal of it, for long after Charley had been dismissed, with another rain of tears and kisses, she sat rocking herself in her chair alone, and murmuring, with frightened face, "To be married from the Hall, and given away with his own hands! It is terrible; it is frightful! They are treading upon the edge of a precipice."

CHAPTER XLIII.

CONSPIRATORS.

It will be easily understood that the terrace-walk on which Charley and Mr. Marks had been wont to discuss metaphysics together now knew them no more. Tutor and pupil were no longer on amicable terms, though, strange to say, the views entertained by Mr. Marks of Charley were much less philosophic than those with which Charley regarded *him*. The milk of human kindness must, however, flow somewhere; and that of Mr. Marks, being diverted from his lapsed young friend, turned to his whilom enemy, Mr. Nayler, and made quite a pool about him. The terrace-walk, as being well out of ear-shot of the Hall, while, on the other hand, it commanded a good view of all intruders, was their favorite haunt. Side by side they would walk for hours, apparently in the greatest amity. It seemed, as Charley said, as though the millennium had arrived, when the weaned child and the cockatrice were on visiting terms, and the noumenon had lain down with the presentment. The bond that

drew them together was a common hatred, which, for temporary purposes and while it lasts, serves its purpose as thoroughly as the tenderest tie. Nor was it confined to a single object. They did not hate Charley, who had declined their friendship, one whit less than they hated Mary, who had declined their love. It must be confessed that the young man had given them some provocation by trifling with their philosophy; but this they would never have discovered had they been left to themselves. A friend, though scarcely a good-natured one, had been so good as to point out in each case that Charley had been amusing himself at their expense. Such an outrage, indeed, seemed almost incredible, but he had contrived to convince them of it. Resentment, of course, does not enter into the philosophic mind. So far as they were personally concerned they would have been well content to leave the offender to such punishment as Order inflicts upon those who transgress her laws; but they could not remain deaf to the voice of public duty.

"I have no more personal enmity to this young man than to yonder cow," said Mr. Marks to Mr. Nayler, as they trod the smooth gravel side by side.

"It is not a cow," returned Mr. Nayler, who piqued himself on his accuracy, and was not near-sighted, as Mr. Marks was; "it is Japhet Marcom, in a stooping position, gathering beet-root, as usual, in the garden. But the sentiment is independent of the metaphor; I share it; I, too, can lay my hand upon my heart and assert that I entertain no feelings towards Charley Sotheran other than those of disappointment."

"Feelings very natural and very justifiable," said Mr. Marks, warmly. "I am told that the manner in which he ridiculed your psychological theories behind your back was most reprehensible."

"Not more so, as I am informed," returned Mr. Nayler, "than the amusement he created in thoughtless persons by his imitation of your metaphysical speculations."

"Which he was by nature wholly incapacitated from understanding," observed Mr. Marks, severely.

"No doubt—no doubt," observed Mr. Nayler, gravely. "He even admitted that much, though he fell into the

error of supposing that they were intrinsically unintelligible. One must allow that he is sufficiently plain-spoken."

"He is the most impudent young man in the world, sir, and at the same time the falsest," put in Mr. Marks, indignantly. "To think that he should have hoodwinked our excellent host, and thereby secured that material success which alone has any attraction for him, is enough to make one doubt of the principles of order."

"Without committing myself so far as to acknowledge them," observed Mr. Nayler, cautiously, "and reserving my judgment upon the whole matter as regards the entity of the individual in question—"

"Entity? How can you talk of entities when he is going off with the money?" broke in Mr. Marks, impatiently.

"Let us say rather he is about to go off," returned Mr. Nayler. "In human affairs there is, properly speaking, no present."

"There's a future, at all events," observed Mr. Marks, dryly, "and that will be made very comfortable for him."

"That is not so certain, if Mr. Paton should discover the young man's unworthiness. Do you remember his likening our esteemed host, on account of his personal appearance, to Tarquinius Superbus?"

"Now you mention it, I do seem to remember something of the kind," said Mr. Marks, with a keen glance at his companion.

"The operations of the memory are most interesting and remarkable," observed Mr. Nayler. "Creation and reproduction are so nearly allied that they may be almost said to be identical. Let us try and remember some more things."

It must be said, in justice to these two gentlemen, that plots and stratagems were by no means in their line. The course of conduct they were now about to enter upon had been suggested to them by an individual of far less intellectual capacity, but of a more practical turn of mind; namely, Mr. Ralph Dornay. He had a theory about evidence, or, rather, as to the production of it, which might have gained for him a high position at the Old Bailey. His notion was that the alleged utterances of an accused

person, C, should be rehearsed between two witnesses, A and B—testimony thus received a firmer shape and tone—and if A should attribute what B had quoted from C's mouth to C himself, it was an error on the right side, and strengthened the case for the prosecution. He had excused himself from all personal participation in the present scheme, upon the ground of delicacy of feeling. Mr. Sotheran and he were known to be on ill terms, and he could, therefore, take no immediate part in his exposure and confusion. He had known the young man (he explained) when he had been paying his attentions to Miss Marvon under other circumstances. She had been at that time employed in a subordinate capacity by Lady Orr, but was a favorite of hers, and had had certain expectations. When these vanished, in consequence of the young lady's own misconduct, Mr. Sotheran had promptly withdrawn his pretensions; and now that fortune once more smiled upon her he had again come forward as a suitor. This was, briefly, the true state of the case. With a good-nature that was, under the circumstances, to be regretted, if not actually reprehensible, Lady Orr had decided to let by-gones be by-gones, which placed Mr. Ralph Dornay himself in a position of much embarrassment; while, unable himself to appear in the matter, he could not in the interests of justice withhold the above information from those (as he understood) who were taking steps to prevent the generosity of Mr. Beryl Paton being abused. As to Miss Marvon, the fact that she still enjoyed (however mistakenly) the favor of Lady Orr must seal Mr. Ralph Dornay's lips; but Dr. Bilde was in a position to supply them with certain facts concerning that young person which would probably make their course an easy one.

Dr. Bilde also kept himself in the background. It was contrary to his principles, which were paramount, to mix himself up with any kind of domestic scandal; his profession was that of a healer, and out of that sacred calling he declined to step. It was unnecessary to say that he was uninfluenced by mercenary considerations, and, indeed, that matter of the codicil seemed to make him independent of them; but he could not consent to risk the loss of Mr. Beryl Paton's confidence in his professional judg-

ment, by allowing his name to be connected with what, no doubt, was a most just and necessary inquiry, but which might be misconstrued as an intrigue.

So Messrs. Marks and Nayler danced (metaphorically) upon the terraced walk together, while Dr. Bilde and Mr. Ralph Dornay deftly pulled the strings. The time was a slow one, as was fit and proper with marionettes of a philosophic turn, and not a step was taken without design. But as time went on the two gentlemen themselves grew very familiar with one another, and discoursed together with an openness that, had there been any possibility of their being overheard, might have been dangerous, and would have been described, even by their allies, as too full of zeal. It never crossed their minds that they were being made cat's-paws; nor, indeed, was there any reason why it should be so, since neither the doctor nor Mr. Dornay could hope for the chestnuts. Their notion was that, having opened Mr. Beryl Paton's eyes to the real character of the persons he designed to benefit, they would lay him under an eternal obligation. It is possible that they also calculated upon receiving a fee in proportion to the success of the operation; and it was certain that there would be a good deal of money "going"—that is to say, that a large sum intended for a certain purpose would be set free for diversion into other channels. But this was by no means the main motive of our two philosophers. Their desire was to see justice done—a noble instinct, but one that is never more powerful than when we have a personal grudge against those who are about to be its victims.

Notwithstanding that time pressed, and that in the meanwhile these righteous souls must needs have been vexed by the contemplation of the happiness of the young couple—who, unconscious of their doom, and callous, as it seemed, to all remorse, were enjoying themselves exceedingly—it was not till long after the indictment was prepared that the mode of presenting it in the proper quarter could be decided upon. Mr. Marks, whose abstruse pursuits and speculations perhaps inclined him to shrink from publicity, was in favor of an anonymous letter, a mode of proceeding which has this peculiar advantage, that if it

misses fire you can disown it, and even lay its composition on somebody else. But Dr. Bilde, who knew the excessive distaste of his patron for all underhand proceedings, so vehemently opposed this scheme that it was abandoned in the bud. Mr. Nayler was for a "round-robin," which, being signed by each member of the Happy Family, would compromise everybody alike. But as here, again, Dr. Bilde pointed out, besides the actual difficulty of getting the signatures, the affair would thereby be only advanced a single stage, it would all be allegation and no proof, until Messrs. Nayler and Marks put themselves in evidence, in which case what would become of the "round-robin," the only effect of whose previous existence would be to weaken the personal claim of the two gentlemen in question upon Mr. Paton's gratitude? These arguments were unanswerable, or, rather, the only answer which Messrs. Nayler and Marks had to offer—namely, that any course seemed preferable to them to taking the whole risk of the enterprise on their own shoulders—it was forbidden them to use. They had gone too far to retreat or retract; and, indeed, when on one occasion Mr. Marks exhibited most unquestionable signs of jibbing, Mr. Ralph Dornay had taken him to task with a very high hand, and expressed his opinion that it was incredible that a man of his intellectual status could be so deficient in common honesty as to allow his friend and patron to be imposed upon, when he had the information in his own hands which could prevent it. And when Mr. Nayler eagerly corroborated this view of affairs with his "Very true," Mr. Dornay turned on him with no little indignation, and observed that what he had been compelled to say to Mr. Marks was equally applicable to Mr. Nayler. Nevertheless the disinclination of both these gentlemen to bell the cat was so extreme that, in spite of their backer's expectations, they positively declined to appeal to Mr. Beryl Paton in person, but set down what they had to say in an epistle marked "Private," and to which their respective signatures were affixed in a handwriting which was the reverse of "bold."

The fact was, that, however Mr. Beryl Paton was admired and revered by the members of the Happy Family

(concerning which none who heard them speak of him could surely entertain a doubt), there was not one who was not secretly afraid of him, and especially of those bursts of passion in which (in common with less benevolent Deputy Providences, such as Peter the Great) he was occasionally accustomed to indulge.

CHAPTER XLIV.

PULLING THE TRIGGER.

It was one of the privileges of those who from time to time Mr. Beryl Paton placed in the forefront of his favors, to be admitted into his counsels, and to have their advice demanded upon this or that scheme of benevolence—a circumstance which sometimes proved the cause of their undoing.

“First catch your patron,” may be an important proviso, but it is useless unless you possess the art of keeping him; and this is the more difficult the more familiar you are with him, inasmuch as he has thereby opportunities to find out how much he was mistaken in you. And thus it had happened to more than one whom Mr. Beryl Paton had delighted to honor. They had been created grand viziers, only to be bowstrung, or, at all events, to be banished from their master’s presence, and to have their names obliterated from his will.

Up to this time Edgar Dornay had held his place by the throne without misadventure: partly, perhaps, because he did not take such pains to keep it as some of his predecessors had done. He was not blind to his own interests, and, as we know, by no means disinclined to the possession of great wealth; but he was not one of those who think that gold can never be bought too dearly, or who have a natural hunger for it. He was neither grasping nor greedy, and much too fond of his ease to seek wealth at the sacrifice of comfort. His manners were agreeable without sycophancy. To Beryl Paton, who was accustomed to the fulsome arts of expectation, it appeared

that the young man had both independence and self-respect. He had never fallen into the error of making stepping-stones of others into Mr. Paton's favor, nor fomented his anger against them; and his behavior as Mary Marvon's rejected suitor had been unexceptionable. He had accepted his *congé* with such good-humor that Mr. Paton, who was, of course, in ignorance of his previous love-passages with Mary, had complimented him upon it.

"Well, sir, of course I am disappointed," Edgar had said, "and the more so because I see you are disappointed too. It would have been easy to shrug my shoulders—impertinence is always easy—but there is no reason, because Miss Marvon refuses me her love, that I should cease to respect her. For my part, I think it a piece of great arrogance to cut the throat of a young lady (as I read in the newspapers often happens) simply because one has failed to recommend one's self to her. That dog-in-the-manger notion of 'If I can't have her nobody else shall' seems to me, to say no worse of it, both egotistic and contemptible."

These generous sentiments were very agreeable to Mr. Beryl Paton, but he had discovered expectation in so many garbs that he was not quite certain of their genuineness. An opportunity now arose to test it.

There came a certain day when, to an attentive observer, the dinner-party at the Hall seemed to have a cloud upon it.

Mr. Charles Sotheran, indeed, was not aware of its existence; and if he had been, it would scarcely have attracted his attention. He was as independent of clouds as a man in a waterproof, or, rather, there was a reflected sunshine about him (emanating from his next neighbor) which destroyed their influence. He had understood from Mr. Rennie (still specially retained on the premises) that when he returned to town to resume his duties at the Probate Office it was within the bounds of possibility that he should take Mary with him; and this naturally afforded him an agreeable topic of conversation with his proposed fellow-traveller.

Except that Mary looked forward with unfeigned regret to her parting from her hostess, no two young people were ever more thoroughly happy. It must be added, to their

honor, that all the ladies sympathized with them; even Miss Parks, who had never been wooed, and Mrs. Welbeck, who had been wooed once too often. It is the attribute of all women, not naturally bad or soured by disappointment, to feel a kindly interest in turtle-doves about to mate. Their coo finds a responsive echo in their gentle breasts as surely as does that of a baby. As for Mrs. Paton, her pleasure in the contemplation of the happiness of her young favorites made her almost oblivious of the vacancy their absence would create in her heart and home. Could she see them married, she could certainly die happy; and as to living, the time for that, she was well convinced, would be but short. If gloom intruded upon her, it was cast by the dread of delay. As the time drew near for the accomplishment of her hopes, the least incident excited her fears; and it did not escape her notice that certain of her guests were more silent than usual, and seemed to avoid even exchanging glances with one another. Had she watched them more narrowly, she might have observed that Mr. Ralph Dornay's manner was more frank and debonair than was usual with him since he had come into his wife's property, and that more than once Dr. Bilde condescended to exchange a few words with him in his superior manner upon unimportant subjects. It seemed as though, freed for a while from their respective responsibilities, these representatives of science and social position had agreed to unbend, and even that they made some point of impressing upon society that for the moment they had nothing of supreme importance upon their minds. Mr. Marks and Mr. Nayler, on the contrary, preserved an unbroken silence, and kept their eyes fixed upon their plates, save that now and then they snatched a furtive glance in the direction of Mr. Beryl Paton, who was dispensing hospitality in his matter-of-course manner, and conversing with Edgar Dornay about the window-gardens of the poor.

Of the proverbial bad quarter of an hour after dinner the two philosophers had little experience: they had not settled many dinner-bills, but they endured quite enough on the present occasion to restore the average. Over the dessert, when the ladies had withdrawn, they

suffered agonies of suspense and apprehension. For though the bill of indictment that had been formed against Charles Sotheran and Mary Marvon had been placed that morning, with their names affixed to it, in Mr. Paton's hands, he had not even acknowledged its receipt. The pistol which had been so skilfully loaded for them they had let off with their own hands, yet no report had followed. Had it missed fire altogether, or what? In that "what" lay the most terrible contingencies. Was it Mr. Paton's intention to treat the matter with silent contempt, or to visit them with his wrath and indignation? Or was he only making inquiries into the truth of their allegations before proceeding to action? Had he taken that operation of having his eyes opened in the very worst part, he could hardly have hit upon a form of punishment more severe than that which he was at present inflicting.

It by no means mitigated their apprehensions that when they applied to Dr. Bilde in their extremity, he gave them neither encouragement nor comfort; nay, what seemed monstrous in a person of his profession, he had not even advice to offer them. He only remarked that, to a well-regulated mind, the approval of one's own conscience, and the conviction that we have done our best to further the cause of moral order, should be a sufficient compensation for whatever happens.

As for Mr. Ralph Dornay, he merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled, as a man with thirty thousand a year can afford to smile at the pecuniary perplexities of his fellow-creatures.

"When you go in for a great stake, gentlemen," he said, with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, "it is only reasonable that you should incur some risk."

To the observation that he had put the thing into their heads, he replied that to reveal what gentlemen said to one another in casual conversation was a breach of confidence, and that to make any use of it to his disadvantage was held on all hands to be so dishonorable that the injured person was justified in giving a distinct denial to anything and everything. This was said with the air of a man who intends to act up to his principles.

Even on a bed of down we are told that conscience is

uneasy. But still one is unwilling to exchange it for a wool mattress; and each of the two philosophers passed a wretched night, from the reflection that it might possibly be the very last time that (left to his own resources) he would sleep in a feather-bed.

In Mr. Paton's study after breakfast some "private theatricals" took place of rather a serious kind. As Edgar and his host were smoking their cigars together as usual, the elder gentleman threw an open letter over to his companion, with a dry "Read that." It was a missive of great length, and had not come by the post, but had been placed in Mr. Paton's hands by his valet, "With Mr. Naylor's compliments," on the previous morning. It took some minutes to get through it, and even when it was done Edgar remained speechless, but full of thought. It is possible that he was hesitating between honor and self-interest; if so, it was fortunate for him that he decided in favor of the former, since, if he had taken the course which looked most to his own advantage he would have repented it.

There were several of the "happy family" for trial that morning, and among them (to judge by the way in which Mr. Paton looked at him from under his large white hand) was Edgar Dornay himself.

"Well, what do you think of it, Dornay?"

"They are lying, sir," was the quiet reply.

"You mean as regards the girl? You think it impossible—"

"I do not think, because I am quite certain," put in Edgar, vehemently, "that Miss Marvon has done nothing to be ashamed of."

"But perhaps—long ago," suggested the old man, tenderly, "under circumstances at which we cannot guess, harassed by trouble, pinched by poverty, tempted—who can tell?"

"I can tell," answered Edgar, quietly. "Never, never."

Mr. Paton hid his eyes, for they sparkled with pleasure.

"But the lad," he went on; "it looks bad against the lad."

"They have made it look bad," said Edgar. His tone had changed; it was still confident, but had lost its fervor.

The matter was comparatively indifferent to him. On the other hand, the man was his successful rival, and it therefore behooved him (an idea which, though they were so full of ideas, would never have occurred to Mr. Marks or Mr. Nayler) to say what good he knew of him.

"Still, if he said these things," said Mr. Paton, pointing to the letter, "it was most ungrateful, and I hate ingratitude."

"Mr. Sotheran's nature is not, in my opinion, an ungrateful one, I will even say"—this with a dead lift, but he did say it—"that it is incapable of ingratitude."

"They say he called me Tarquinius Superbus," muttered Mr. Paton, pulling at his long white beard.

"I did not say that Mr. Sotheran was incapable of an impertinence," was the quiet reply.

"These gentlemen, to use their own words," said Mr. Paton, "have 'courted investigation.' I have caused certain inquiries to be made, the result of which will be placed before us. They have asked for justice; they shall have it. Will you oblige me by ringing the bell?"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE INDICTMENT.

EDGAR DORNAY was very far from wishing to be a spectator of what was about to follow. But an heir presumptive has his duties, and it was a part of them in this case to stand on the right hand of the sovereign while administering justice. In the Letcombe Dottrell kingdom there was a still more significant sign of heirship—namely, to be present during Mr. Paton's confidences with his lawyer; but to that topmost peak of expectation Edgar Dornay had not yet reached. Though on a very high rung of the ladder, he was still on his promotion. Mr. Paton had never to ring twice except for a reason; when he did so, it produced not the footman but his valet.

"Derwood," he said, "ask Mr. Marks and Mr. Nayler to be so good as to favor me with their company."

Nothing could be more stolidly respectful than Mr. Derwood's face as he left the room to execute his master's orders, but directly the door had closed behind him it became full of expression. Sailors talk in their melodramatic manner of "the plank between them and eternity," but a great man's door is also a plank of some importance, on one side of which things take place that never occur upon the other.

"Here's another row," soliloquized the valet, laying his finger to the side of his nose, as was his habit when reflecting upon the changes and chances of human life, of which, since he had been some years at Letcombe Hall, he had seen something; "if the goose of them two gents isn't cooked my name isn't Sam Derwood." Then, as if suddenly affected by a reminiscence (though, in his case, it was the absence of one), he added briskly, "and a good job, too. I don't remember as either of them ever gave me so much as would buy a cigar with."

If there is a mammon of unrighteousness which it behooves persons who live in expectancy to make friends of, it is their patron's valet; yet Messrs. Marks and Nayler had entirely omitted this precaution. They ought by rights to have been millionnaires, so slow they were to part with their money; Mr. Marks, it is true, had feed Scarsdale, because her evidence was important to the present inquiry, and Mr. Nayler (not to waste his means upon a mere presentment) had chucked her under the chin; but the bribe in neither case would have been sufficient to enlist her aid had she not been disposed to help them for other reasons. Now, though years of service had robbed Scarsdale of her youth, they had enabled her (in compensation) to put by a tidy sum of money, whereof Mr. Samuel Derwood being enamoured, he had proposed to her; and, either in order to make a cheap show of virtue, or to stimulate Mr. Derwood himself to similar gallantries, she had confessed in her own way (she had even added "he kissed me") Mr. Nayler's indiscretion to the valet.

His jealous indignation may be imagined. "What!" he cried, "do you mean to say he never gave you nothing to take the taste out of it? Scaly varmint!"

Ignorant of this extraneous enemy, but with sufficient

apprehensions of danger from more direct sources, the two philosophers were ushered into the hall of audience. Mr. Paton, standing with his back to the fireplace, gravely pointed out two chairs immediately opposite that in which his young friend was already seated. Never had involuntary spectator a better view of any performance than the unfortunate Edgar.

"I have requested my friend Mr. Dornay's presence here," observed Mr. Paton, in explanation, "because I have confidence in his judgment, and also because he has some knowledge of the previous history of the two persons whom the document you have placed in my hands concerns. He is already acquainted with its contents, so that it will be unnecessary to read it. Have you anything to add, gentlemen, to the information which it purports to afford?"

"Nothing, save that it is all true," observed Mr. Marks, in a solemn tone. It had been agreed between the two accusers that Mr. Marks should be their mouth-piece; and if he had been appointed Speaker to the House of Commons he could not have acquitted himself with greater dignity and sedateness.

"That is a bold thing to say of eight pages of manuscript," returned Mr. Paton; "yet even if it *were* true, I should have thought you might, at least, have added that it was with sincere regret you found yourself compelled to make such allegations against two young people whose future fortunes it was only too likely to affect for ill. But perhaps," he added, with unmistakable irony, "you never thought of the future."

This was very rough on the philosophers, whose silence (which had provoked this outbreak) was in reality caused by the embarrassment of their position. What Mr. Marks had had it on the tip of his tongue to say was, that it was with a bleeding heart he had forced himself to make these charges; but that where the interests of so dear and revered a friend as Mr. Beryl Paton were concerned, all other considerations sank into insignificance. But such sentiments are for a patron's ear alone. With Edgar Dornay sitting within two feet of him, it was really impossible to indulge in them. Far from suspecting that that

gentleman was almost as uncomfortable as himself, he did him the injustice of supposing him capable of exclaiming "Rubbish!" at the conclusion of some burst of loyalty.

Mr. Marks did, however, manage to say that he had only performed what was to him a most unpleasant duty. He had noticed that Mr. Paton had showed considerable favor to Mr. Charles Sotheran, and the gross ingratitude which the young man had evinced when speaking of his benefactor, not to mention the motives of self-interest by which he was evidently actuated—

"Never mind the motives," interrupted Mr. Paton, dryly. "We can all supply those for one another. Let us stick to facts. He was disrespectful to me in his conversation, it seems?"

"Very," observed Mr. Marks.

"And frequently, eh?"

"Always," struck in Mr. Nayler.

"Then, it strikes me, you must have encouraged him," suggested Mr. Paton.

Nothing, averred both gentlemen, could be more groundless than such an accusation. They had been too appalled to stop him, and simply let him run on. What must have been their feelings, for example, Mr. Marks ventured to inquire, with a glance towards the indictment—what must have been their righteous indignation when this young person had the audacity to liken his patron to Tarquinius Superbus?

"Why did he call me that, I wonder?" inquired Mr. Paton, with a glance at Edgar.

"'Though white as Mount Soracte
When winter nights are long,'"

suggested the young poet,

"'His beard flowed down o'er mail and belt,
His heart and hand were strong.'"

"To be sure—a very apt quotation," observed the old man, smiling. "His other remarks, however, it seems were not so complimentary. Is this allegation literally true, gentlemen, that Mr. Sotheran said 'The old fool'?" (he here read an extract from the indictment) "'will set-

tle some money on 'the girl (meaning Miss Marvon), and then I will marry her;' and again, 'I wish the old fool was dead.'"

"Those were the words Mr. Sotheran used," said Mr. Marks, with a slight cough, as if something stuck in his throat.

"Is that your impression also, Mr. Nayler?"

"He made use, if not of those actual words, of words of a similar purport, sir."

"There was a witness once who said 'the prisoner cried "Bill, Bill," or words to that effect,'"

observed Mr. Paton, dryly. "I trust, Mr. Nayler, you will be found to be equally conscientious. I have made inquiries, however, into this matter, and testimony will be produced which does not quite bear out what you two gentlemen have said. It tends to prove, I am sorry to say, that though Mr. Sotheran may have been indiscreet and disrespectful in his language, a certain color has been given to it."

"Not by us, sir," murmured Mr. Marks. A dreadful suspicion crossed his mind that Ralph Dornay and Dr. Bilde were acting treacherously to them, and for some reason of their own had turned informers. For to what other testimony could their host refer?

Mr. Paton rang the bell, and by some intermediate agency, for it is certain he could never have heard it, it was answered by Japhet Marcom, the deaf mute.

Notwithstanding his height and strong build, this man had usually the patient, apathetic look which belongs to those who are similarly afflicted—a gentle attentiveness, as if they would fain listen to you if they could. But on this occasion there was a severity in his face that almost approached truculence.

"You have seen these gentlemen walking on the terrace lately now and then, Japhet," said Mr. Paton, indicating the two philosophers with his fingers.

Japhet's eyes shone "yes," as he inclined his head with quiet confidence.

"And from where you were you could hear—in your way—pretty accurately what they said?"

Mr. Marks and Mr. Nayler smiled incredulously, as, indeed, did Edgar himself. Japhet's services were devoted

to his master, and not given to the public at large. If the Happy Family ever bestowed a thought upon him, it was to conclude (as, indeed, was the fact) that his name was to be found among the lesser blessed in Mr. Paton's will. They knew that his master and he had some mysterious means of communicating with one another, and that was all."

"You seem to doubt Japhet's powers, gentlemen," observed Mr. Paton. "Be so kind, Mr. Dornay, as to ask him a question for yourself."

"Is the clock at the church, Japhet," inquired Edgar, "faster or slower than the Hall time?"

The mute pointed to the timepiece over the mantelpiece, and moved his hand with great rapidity.

"He says our time is faster," explained Mr. Paton. "If you had made the inquiry fifty feet hence, and in a whisper, he would have heard you equally well. If he is near enough to see the movement of your lips he can tell what they say. If you doubt this, gentlemen, you can make proof of it for yourselves, but for my part I know it to be the case; and whatever Japhet has repeated to me of this matter is, to my mind, I frankly tell you, testimony to be relied on as surely as though he had made a third at your interviews, and every word you said had been addressed to him."

Mr. Marks's lips moved as if he himself were dumb; Mr. Nayler gibbered like a ghost, or a detected presentment.

"Japhet has, at my suggestion," continued Mr. Paton, "written out a detailed account of what he heard in the walled garden. It is here, open to your inspection, gentlemen, and—if it can be refuted—to your refutation. Japhet alleges that you agreed together that there could be no harm in putting into Mr. Sotheran's mouth the sentiments which you took it for granted he entertained. For example, since you supposed he would like Miss Marvon no less for being well dowered, you thought it a natural thing to make Mr. Sotheran say, 'The old fool will settle some money on the girl, and then I will marry her.' Do you still maintain, gentlemen, that those were the actual words Mr. Sotheran used? On the other hand, Japhet

is confident as to your own employment of this rather singular phrase"—here Mr. Paton once more referred to the manuscript—"By hook or by crook, we must get both the boy and the wench out of the house."

"It seems to me, Mr. Paton," said Mr. Marks, turning very pale, and speaking in quavering tones, "that you have hardly behaved quite fairly to us in discussing in the presence of a third person"—here he indicated Edgar Dornay—"a matter which was communicated to you under the seal of confidence. Our communication, if you will be so good as to observe, was marked 'private and confidential.'"

"Good heavens, sir! am I the Lion of Venice," exclaimed Mr. Paton, angrily, "that I should take every charge for granted that malice and ill-will may invent against an innocent man? If I hesitate to confront him with his accusers, do you suppose that is for their sakes, and merely because they have expressed a wish—under the circumstances, a very natural wish—to remain anonymous? What right have you to complain because I take this gentleman here into my confidence? What hinders you from defending yourselves because he is present?"

It was rather difficult for poor Mr. Marks to explain his position—the statement that his conversations with Mr. Naylor had been overheard, which he did not in the least doubt, had utterly overwhelmed him. He was conscious of having said so many damaging things. There seemed to him but one way of escape for them out of the hole—just as the fox made use of the goat in the well—namely, on the shoulders of Mr. Ralph Dornay. He would like to have said that the character that gentleman had given them of Mr. Sotheran had so utterly shocked their sense of propriety that they had taken what might certainly seem somewhat extreme measures to prevent Mr. Paton's favor from being abused. They had gone, perhaps, farther than they were justified in going, but not of themselves; Mr. Ralph Dornay had given them the momentum. This is what seemed their best, and, indeed, their only line of defence; but how could they take it in the presence of Mr. Dornay's nephew?

"You must remember, sir," said Mr. Marks, wetting his

dry lips as the serpent flickers with his forked tongue, "that there is another person implicated in this unhappy matter, and that a motive of delicacy, which you will, I am sure, both understand and appreciate, prevents its full discussion—ahem!—under present circumstances."

"Pray do not let your consideration for Miss Marvon stand in your way," replied Mr. Paton, coldly. "If you have nothing more to say against the young lady than you have had to urge against Mr. Sotheran it will not distress Mr. Dornay, though he entertains as high a regard for her as any one must do who has the good-fortune to be acquainted with her."

"You must please to remember, Mr. Paton," said Mr. Marks, hurriedly, "that we have personally made no charge of any kind against Miss Marvon. We have only repeated, from a sense of what was owing to yourself, what we have heard of her from other sources, and which a very little inquiry on your part will corroborate or disprove."

"You speak of other sources," said Mr. Paton, icily; "be so good as to name one of them."

"Permit me, sir, to mention Scarsdale, Mrs. Paton's maid."

CHAPTER XLVI.

SCARSDALE'S TESTIMONY.

At the name of Mrs. Paton there flitted across her husband's face an angry flush. Notwithstanding his democratic opinions, and the freedom with which he mingled with his inferiors, Beryl Paton was intensely proud, though, as men of his class often are, only at second-hand. He himself, that is, had no objection to be treated as an equal by any human being; but his belongings were "taboo;" he resented—and all the more because he himself paid so little deference to her opinions—the least disrespect shown to his wife. Even the introduction of her maid's name into the matter on hand annoyed him, because it might be the prelude to the citation of Mrs. Paton herself. Never-

theless, he was not the man to suffer his private feelings to interfere with the course of justice.

"If Mrs. Paton's maid has anything to say to this matter let her say it," he said, and that lady was summoned accordingly.

To Messrs. Marks and Nayler her appearance gave a great relief, for they felt that in her hands their cause was far safer than in their own. As a junior, with the conduct of a great case unexpectedly thrust upon his inadequate shoulders, joys to see his leader suddenly appear in court, and trusts that his mistakes will be repaired and his lost ground recovered, so did they hail the appearance of their female ally. Though very far from being innocents, they were ill adapted by nature for plots and stratagems; and if they had not known as much half an hour ago, they knew it now. They were conscious of having, so far, made a complete and deplorable failure of the little matter they had taken in hand. On paper, that is to say while they were talking the affair over between themselves, their plan of the campaign had seemed to be perfect. Each had only to corroborate the other's story, and the thing was done. That the cause should ever come to be tried in open court had never entered into their calculations. It was shameful that such doubts should have been thrown upon two gentlemen's words; while as for the unlooked-for intervention of Japhet Marcom, it was a circumstance little short of diabolic. But what in reality more alarmed them and put them off their balance than all the rest, was the tone and manner of Mr. Paton himself. What they had looked for was not, indeed, an upright judge; they had imagined that, weighed down by the sense of obligation arising from their disinterested action, he would have leaned very considerably in their direction; whereas it was now evident that he was inclining to the other side.

Hitherto, however, testimony had been hostile to them: in the excellent Scarsdale they felt sure of a partisan. She had spoken to them of Miss Marvon with such bitterness, upon her own account, that they were confident nothing would be wanting to her accuracy in the way of zeal. She was not beautiful, but they did not require a Phryne to

plead their cause. Her high color suggested animus—the right animus; her set lips resolution; nor did her large black eyes abate their keenness one whit, though she stood in the presence of her master.

“You have something to say, it seems, concerning Miss Marvon?” observed Mr. Paton, quietly. “What is it?”

“About Miss Marvon? Me, sir? No, sir!”

Her look was innocence itself, mingled with amazed surprise.

“Well, you *have* said something about her, at all events,” said Mr. Paton, coldly. “Is it not so, gentlemen?” he addressed his remark to the two philosophers, but Scarsdale answered it:

“Not as I am aware on, sir; I have never spoken of the young lady except in answer to questions.”

If this reply was accidental, it was a most unfortunate one for the prosecutors, since it suggested the process called pumping; but if it was intentional—designed, that is, to isolate them and place the speaker herself in a position of neutrality—their case was pitiable indeed. Mr. Marks felt like an indifferent swimmer, who, having just seized hold of some sapling on the bank which promised safety, finds it gradually coming up by the roots.

“Mr. Nayler and I put certain inquiries to this young person,” he explained, “which were necessitated by the circumstances of the case. We knew that there was a secret—I regret to say, a shameful secret—connected with Miss Marvon’s past; and we thought, acting as we were in your interests, that the most likely person to enlighten us upon the subject was her waiting-maid.”

“I am not Miss Marvon’s maid,” exclaimed Scarsdale, vehemently.

To a close observer, this was the first sign of naturalness which this lady had evinced; hitherto she had been under the influence of a severe self-restraint, but in these words she broke away from it.

“Of course not, Scarsdale,” put in Mr. Marks, soothingly; “you are Mrs. Paton’s own maid; still, you have necessarily seen much of her companion. Now, what did you tell me and Mr. Nayler here, on Wednesday last, respecting her.”

"Nothing—nothing; that is, as I particularly remember."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! but you surely must," insisted Mr. Marks; the fact of his having given her half a sovereign on the occasion in question had impressed all the surrounding circumstances so vividly upon his own mind that he could not understand this plea of forgetfulness in another. "You told us, you know, how very intimate your mistress was with Miss Marvon, so much so that it made the young lady 'forget her place,' as you expressed it."

"I don't remember," reiterated Scarsdale, stolidly. This second disclaimer was a mistake; it is possible to make a false step in refusing to take any step at all. It was clear to both Mr. Paton and to Edgar that the phrase in question had been Scarsdale's own. This seemed even to strike herself—or perhaps the glances they exchanged with each other did not escape her—for she presently added, "I don't say as Missis and Miss Marvon were not intimate."

"Just so, and very confidential," put in Mr. Marks. "They talked together pretty often of Miss Marvon's proposed marriage, did they not?"

"Sometimes."

"And your mistress seemed to be in a hurry about it, did she not? Now, why was that?"

"Because," said Scarsdale, slowly, and with her eyes on the carpet, "Missis felt far from well, and seemed afraid she should never live to see the marriage in which she took such an interest take place."

"Will you swear," inquired Mr. Marks, with indignation, "that the reason you gave to me wasn't that there was something discreditable about Miss Marvon which time might bring to light, and that therefore she was in a hurry to get the matter concluded, with Mr. Paton's sanction?"

Scarsdale looked up to the ceiling, and half opened her mouth (as though to depict or allegorize an effort of memory), then shook her head and answered rapidly, like a gentleman used to taking official affidavits, "No, I never did!"

"Then, perhaps, you will also venture to affirm," said Mr. Marks, with the calmness of despair, "that you did not quote to me the other day, 'This house for you is full of pitfalls,' as an expression used by Mrs. Paton to Miss Marvon to denote the imminent danger of her secret being discovered so long as she remained at Letcombe Hall?"

Miss Scarsdale's color heightened; she cast at her master a furtive, inquiring glance, as though she would have asked, "Now, what do *you* think? If I said 'I didn't,' should I pass the extreme limit of that credulity a gentleman owes to a lady's word or not?" Then boldly answered, "No; I don't remember nothing about pitfalls."

It was an audacious stroke, but it failed. I sympathize with her, because when I myself have a story suggested to me I never can tell it like one for which I am indebted to my own fancy; and Miss Scarsdale was acting under instructions. Her instinct was to tell the truth, and more. She would have liked to have said all she knew of Miss Marvon, and have added to it what she thought of her. But Mr. Derwood had forbidden it. It might be thought, since she was ten years his senior, that she ought to have known best how to act; but his youth—or comparative youth—was the very thing that gave him so much influence with her. It was probably her last chance of a husband. "The game is up, Maria," he had said. "I can see by the governor's look that them two gents are in Queer Street; so, whatever you do, say nothing to back 'em." And this had been the secret of Scarsdale's tergiversation, as simple as Columbus's egg-trick, when you came to know it; but to Mr. Marks and Mr. Nayler, who didn't know it, utterly inexplicable. It is no wonder that she had not acted naturally the *rôle* thus imposed on her. Who could expect the villain of a piece to take a virtuous part at a moment's notice and play it with any gusto? At those words, "I don't remember nothing about pitfalls," Mr. Paton leaned across to Edgar, and, without taking much pains to drop his voice, observed, "This woman is lying."

Poor Scarsdale! Left to herself, she might have scrambled on along the way of villany for life with considerable success, till she came to the precipice whither we must all

come; but this solitary attempt to tread the path of virtue (though it was altogether involuntary) was her ruin. She had the misfortune to be afflicted with the malady (not solely confined to females) called a "temper." Blind with wrath, oblivious of her betrothed and his injunctions, and utterly careless of consistency, she hastened to retrace her steps.

"If you don't believe me, and want to hear something as'll make your hair stand on end, you had better ask Miss Marvon herself."

"A very good plan," observed Mr. Paton, in cold and measured tones. He might have been a statue carved in granite, but that at the same moment he nodded significantly at Japhet Marcom. It was not a moment too soon. As the deaf mute stepped forward to put the furious woman out of the room, she broke out,

"Miss Marvon, indeed; you want to know about her, do you? Ask Mr. Ralph Dornay, ask Dr. Bilde, ask Miss Innocence herself. Hoity toity! here's a fuss about a pretty face. There's no fool like an—"

The rest of the proverb was lost in the passage, but the application of it was preserved by the contemptuous glance she cast, before the door closed on her ejected form, at Mr. Beryl Paton.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SUSPICION.

EARNESTNESS has become so common a trade, and also so mechanical a one, that the expression of it has little effect on anybody; a touch of nature, on the other hand (which nowadays one meets with but seldom), goes home to every heart. Miss Scarsdale might not have been right in the opinion she had expressed, or hinted, with respect to Miss Mary Marvon, but it had been obviously a genuine one, and so far had its merits. It may seem strange that the wild words of an angry waiting-woman should so move a man like Beryl Paton; but the truth was, that

parting shot of hers, "Ask Mr. Ralph Dornay, ask Dr. Bilde, ask Miss Innocence herself," had pierced his very heart. It had suggested—what is feared almost as much by the patron as by the tyrant—a conspiracy. To a benevolent man who has any knowledge of the world, ingratitude in the individual is nothing surprising. It is one of the drawbacks to which the profession of philanthropy is naturally exposed, as that of the farmer is to a bad harvest, or that of the merchant to a bad debt; but when the objects of one's benevolence band together and conspire to hoodwink us, the matter becomes serious, because it implies something amiss in our private compensation balance for setting the world to rights, something rotten at the root of our own system. If Mr. Ralph Dornay and Dr. Bilde knew something discreditable about Mary Marvon, and had suffered him to waste his favors, and, what was worse, his affection, upon an unworthy object, why might not others know it? It was true they had shown no liking for her, but even that might have been a part of their duplicity; they might have been in league together none the less that they showed no sign of alliance. On the other hand, Mr. Beryl Paton was very unwilling to believe anything to Mary's discredit. Her sweetness of disposition had won upon him further than he cared to acknowledge, and also in spite of himself. Once before he had been moved very strongly in favor of a young girl in a somewhat similar position in that very house, and she had disappointed him cruelly. She had listened to the unworthy solicitations of his own son, which had proved the beginning of unutterable troubles. Was it possible that he was about to be disappointed and deceived a second time? While these bitter thoughts were falling through his mind like sleet Mr. Nayler spoke. Up to this time, and while matters had been going so dead against him, that gentleman had been well content to use Mr. Marks for a mouth-piece; but now that things had taken a decided turn in his favor, he was moved to speak, as a bird tunes his note in the sunshine after showers.

"You were saying it would be a good plan, Mr. Paton, to question Miss Marvon herself. That strikes me as an excellent suggestion."

Whether excellent or not, it was certainly not an original one, for it had been proposed by Miss Scarsdale. And this consideration, among others, may have made it unwelcome to Mr. Paton.

"Do you suppose I am going to send for the young lady *here*," he exclaimed, with indignation, "to be examined and cross-examined by you and Mr. Marks; or even that I should expose her to the indignity of answering questions of a private nature in your presence?"

"Certainly not, sir," said Mr. Nayler, hurriedly. To do him justice, he would have shrunk from any such proceeding. What he would have preferred was to have been an unseen spectator of the investigation—like Lady Teazle in the screen scene, only more virtuous—and to have disclosed himself at the *dénouement*, just as Mary was being turned out of the house.

"Then I think, gentlemen," said Mr. Paton, "you had better withdraw; you may be assured of justice being done in this affair in your absence just as though you were witnesses to its administration."

"We leave the matter in your hands, sir," said Mr. Marks, rising, "with the utmost confidence in your sense of right; and whatever may come of this investigation—the necessity of which we deeply deplore—we feel assured that you will give us credit, at least, for having had no other end in view than the exposure of unworthiness."

"I do not pretend to be a judge of motives, Mr. Marks," was the dry reply; "but the facts of the case, you may rely upon it, shall be thoroughly investigated." Mr. Nayler drew out his handkerchief—Mr. Marks had a dreadful misgiving that he was about to burst into tears and confess all—and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. If it was a device to gain time, in order to say a word or two on his own account after the other had left the room, it failed of its intent. Mr. Marks slipped his arm within his own and led him out like a lady, but with a certain amount of vigor that forbade delay.

Thus left alone with his young friend, Mr. Paton turned towards him with a grave, pained face.

"What do you think of it all, Mr. Dornay?" he inquired.

“As respects Miss Marvon, sir, my opinion is quite unaltered.”

“I am glad to hear you say so. Still, there is some scandal afoot regarding her which it is necessary, for her own sake, to get to the bottom of. That woman we have just seen believed it; those gentlemen believed it.”

“Let us say they wished to believe it, sir.”

“Perhaps; I am not sure,” returned the other, gravely. “We must give no verdict till we have heard all the evidence.”

“It is quite impossible, however,” said Edgar, apprehensively, “as you were saying, to interrogate Miss Marvon herself;” and, indeed, it is but fair to say that Edgar Dornay would have given up all his hopes of inheritance to Beryl Paton’s wealth (though he knew them by this time to be well founded) rather than have been a party to any such thing.

“Quite true; but I must learn the truth, and the whole truth,” said the old man. “There is something wrong. ‘Pitfalls,’” he murmured; “‘this place,’ she said, ‘is full of pitfalls.’ Rennie knows her; I will ask Rennie to speak with her. I wish I had spoken to Rennie at first.”

To one who knew Beryl Paton this admission of a mistake, in the presence of another person, was full of significance, and augured well, indeed, for the fortunes of his confidant. The Catholic religion was one that would never have attracted him to its fold, since it enjoins the confession of errors; not even to himself, when anything went wrong, was Mr. Paton accustomed to own that it had done so through his fault.

“At all events, there has been no harm done,” said Edgar, soothingly. This was taking a sanguine view of affairs; for two philosophers, a serving-man that is neither deaf nor dumb, and an angry waiting-maid, with a suspected but undiscovered secret among them, are surely elements of disturbance in any household. Reading something of this in Mr. Paton’s face as he laid his hand upon the bell-rope, “Don’t you think,” continued Edgar, “that instead of sending for Mr. Rennie, it will be well for me to go and fetch him; you could then consult together on what would be advisable, without attracting public attention.”

"Right, my lad, as you usually are," said Mr. Paton, approvingly. "You will find him in his room, no doubt. Just ask him to step round."

Mr. Edgar Dornay's advice had been even more discreet than his host had imagined it to be. In offering it he had had his own enfranchisement in view, at least as much as anything else; and when Mr. Rennie, after some interval, made his appearance, he was alone.

"Where is Edgar?" were Mr. Paton's first words.

"Gone for a constitutional—at least, so he said."

"Ah, that was his excuse; he did not wish to intrude his presence without an express invitation. What I like him for is his delicacy."

"Perhaps it was that which made him feel the atmosphere of the court a little oppressive," said the lawyer, dryly. "He seemed uncommonly glad to get away."

"The whole proceedings were very painful to him, no doubt," assented Mr. Paton. "I take it for granted he has told you what has passed."

The lawyer nodded gravely.

"His own behavior throughout has been most admirable," continued Mr. Paton, earnestly.

"He told me that too," said the lawyer; "or, at least, led me to conclude as much."

"You are very hard and very unjust, as you always are, in the case of every one in whom I take an interest," said Mr. Paton, walking to and fro, and speaking with great irritation.

"It's such a waste of sympathy to take your first view of them," said Mr. Rennie, "since in the end you always find them out."

"In Edgar Dornay there is nothing to find out," observed the other, confidently.

"At all events, he isn't the subject of our present discussion," answered the lawyer, dryly. "You wish to speak to me, as I understand, about Miss Marvon."

"Yes; Marks and Nayler have put this into my hands—a sort of bill of indictment; and here's Japhet's account of the matter, which puts a part of it—that which relates to Sotheran—in a very different point of view. Just run your eye over them."

When the lawyer had finished his examination he looked up, and observed, quietly, "The thing's plain enough, in my judgment. It's not the first time, my dear Paton, nor the second, that you have asked my opinion upon a similar set of circumstances."

"You think it's mere jealousy—the wish to supplant?"

"How can you doubt it? 'By hook or by crook we must get the boy and wench out of the house' is the key of the whole position. Japhet is sure about the words, I conclude."

"Quite certain. But both Marks and Nayler assert most positively that there is something in the girl's past of which she has reason to be ashamed."

"Who told them that?" inquired Mr. Rennie, quickly.

"I don't know. Marks said 'other sources,' but declined to give his authority."

"Did he? I should like to have him in a witness-box for five minutes. However, I can do without him. It was Dr. Bilde."

"Then it's true," exclaimed Beryl Paton, sadly; he was thinking of Scarsdale's testimony—"ask Mr. Ralph Dornay, ask Dr. Bilde." But to Mr. Rennie, who was unaware of this, the remark seemed singularly inconsequent.

"I don't agree with your premises, my dear Paton," he answered, bluntly; "but, as it happens, I do with your conclusions. Miss Marvon *has* a past of which she is ashamed."

"Then there is no such thing as simplicity in women," exclaimed the old man, sadly. "And you, too, knew it, and never told me." He uttered a deep sigh and fell into his chair. "It is my fate to be fooled by every one in whom I put trust."

"It is the fate of most people, my dear Paton," answered the lawyer, quietly; "but as regards Miss Marvon there is no cause, so far as I know, for disappointment. I said she was ashamed of her past, but not that she had reason for being ashamed of it. She has been weak, she *is* weak, but she is not guilty."

"You would not say that if she was ten years older," said the old man, gloomily. "It is wonderful what exten-

uating circumstances even a lawyer will find in youth if the culprit is a woman!"

Mr. Rennie opened his eyes to an extent that, upon his own account, they had rarely reached before.

"To make your cynic," he murmured, "there is certainly nothing like your thorough-going philanthropist soured. What I meant, Mr. Paton," he added, aloud, "was that Miss Marvon took a morbid view of her own position, which is simply that she has the misfortune to be of illegitimate birth."

"Do you mean to say that's all!" exclaimed the old man.

"I will lay my life on it," said the lawyer. "Dr. Bilde and the rest discovered something wrong, and hoped for the worst, whereas they've only found a mare's nest."

"But it's a positive advantage," argued Beryl Paton. "No family ties—no leeches. Why, the girl is to be congratulated."

"Well, I didn't do *that*," said the lawyer, comically; "but upon the circumstances coming to my knowledge, I did my best to combat her own morbid views upon the subject."

"Poor thing—poor thing! And who were her parents?"

The lawyer played with his watch-chain, and answered, with an indifferent air, "Well, the fact is, she doesn't know."

"Good heavens! then they may be alive now, and when she has got a little money will be sure to turn up again. A woman who is well off is never in want of relatives."

"They're dead—both dead," said Mr. Rennie, curtly.

"How can she know they're dead if she doesn't know who they were?" was the quick reply.

"Somebody else knows—at least, I suspect so. The matter is kept secret from her, probably for some good reason."

"I must know," ejaculated Mr. Paton. His face had suddenly grown dark and frowning, and his lips trembled uneasily; they were saying to his inward ear, "What did that woman mean by pitfalls?"

"It is a secret that, in my opinion, ought to be respected," argued Mr. Rennie.

"You know it, then," put in the old man, with a glance of keen suspicion.

"I do not know it, Mr. Paton; nor, since any allusion to it obviously gives the poor girl pain, have I sought to discover it. Why should you, of all men, who hold the ties of consanguinity so cheap, be solicitous to do so? Why should it not be sufficient for you to be assured—as I do now assure you—that Miss Marvon herself is without the shadow of reproach?"

"No matter why; it is not sufficient. You have said that somebody else knows. You will be so good as to furnish me at once with that person's name."

A flush came into the lawyer's face at the other's suspicious manner, but he answered, dryly enough, "I thought I had already told you I only suspected who it was. I will go to that person, however, and if I have guessed right will endeavor to obtain the information you desire."

"It is some one in this house, then?" exclaimed the other, vehemently, as the lawyer rose to leave the room.

"No, sir, it is not; it is some one out of the house."

As the door closed upon his companion Beryl Paton drew a long breath of relief; and as he passed his hand across his forehead, the furrows which angry suspicion had raised there slowly smoothed themselves away. If the some one who alone could solve this mystery was "out of the house," that person could not be his wife.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"IT CAN BUT COST ME A CLIENT."

THOUGH the lawyer had quitted Mr. Paton's presence with an air of indifference, and as if bound on an errand of small importance, this was no indication of his real feelings; he had left his client, indeed, far more at ease than he was himself.

Though a man of few words, he gave attention to the words of others, and with his half-shut eyes saw more than any one suspected. During his stay at Letcombe

Hall he had acquired, without eavesdropping, or chucking a lady's-maid under the chin, more information than Dr. Bilde and the two philosophers together. Unlike these gentlemen, however, he had learned quite enough, and was very unwilling to push his investigations further. But now it behooved him to push them. If Mr. Paton had been content to take things as he found them, it would have been no part of Mr. Rennie's duty to stimulate his curiosity; but once his client had expressed a wish to know the truth, he had no alternative but, having found it, to communicate it to him. And he felt only too sure that whither his steps were now leading him, namely, to Bank Cottage, he was about to find it.

Mrs. Sotheran, as usual, was within-doors; like most women of her nervous and apprehensive nature, she was a stay-at-home—content to let unfriendly Fate come to her own door rather than go forth to meet it. Even in her youth, when her step was elastic, and she drew her breath without being conscious of the process, exercise had had no charms for her. The fresh air is not for the feeble; the winds of heaven visit them too roughly, and only serve to remind them of their weakness. And of late she had other reasons for remaining under her own roof. As the time drew near for her son's marriage with the girl whom she had learned to love next to her son, a certain picture of a mediæval type was always presenting itself to her morbid imagination: the figure of Beryl Paton coming up the hill towards her cottage door with this inquiry coming scroll-wise out of his mouth, "Be so good as to tell me who is the young person calling herself Mary Marvon?"

That her son should be happily married, and no questions asked, seemed too much bliss to one who made such modest demands on fortune as the poor widow.

When she saw from her window Mr. Rennie leave the high-road and turn into the bridle-path that led to her dwelling, she knew what he was come about as well as though he had already told her. She might almost have addressed him in the terms used by a lady of a similar temperament who at last found a burglar under her bed, "You are the very individual I have been looking for

for these twenty years." It is often the misfortune of this too-providential class to be miserable all their lives about a catastrophe that may never happen; on the other hand, they have certainly the advantage of being prepared for it.

It was with hands that did not tremble, though with a sinking heart, that she opened the door for her visitor, before he knocked at it, and ushered him into her neat little parlor; she was prepared for the worst, and had strung her frail nature up to meet it.

"Why, one would really think you had expected my visit," said the lawyer, cheerfully.

"I saw you coming up the hill," she murmured, evasively; and her head, which was still a pretty one, nodded spasmodically from side to side.

"What a pleasant house and a charming situation you have here!" said Mr. Rennie, who knew very well what that movement meant; "for my part, I like this even better than the view from the Hall;" and he regarded the landscape through the window for a few moments as though he would like to hug it. "I just looked in for a word or two with you on a matter of business. Can you give me five minutes of your time, my dear Mrs. Sotheran, and alone?"

"Susan is gone down the village, and Jane is in the kitchen," answered the widow; and with either of those young women she would very gladly have changed places for the remainder of her existence if only the lawyer would not have said another word.

"Very good, then, since we are liable to no interruption, I may say at once that the subject of our conversation will be Mary Marvon—you know all about her, of course."

"I know something, but what I know, Mr. Rennie, I am not at liberty to tell," said the widow. The words came glibly enough, for many a time she had rehearsed them in anticipation of some such an inquiry; but all her preparation could not keep her head from that nervous shaking, nor her frame from trembling in every limb.

"You are quite right to be reticent, Mrs. Sotheran; nothing is more natural than that you should say to yourself, 'This is no business of Mr. Rennie's,' nor, indeed, is

it. I am here as the representative of Mr. Beryl Paton, and at his express request. It is not unreasonable that he should wish to know something about the antecedents of this young lady, whom he is about to dower handsomely, and concerning whom I may confide to you he has also ulterior intentions. He wishes to be quite certain that these benefits will be conferred upon a person who is worthy of them."

"I have known Mary Marvon from her birth," said the widow, confidently, "and have never seen aught but good in her. She is one in a thousand."

"So far the court is with you, Mrs. Sotheran," said the lawyer, smiling; "if you had said one in ten thousand—so far as I have any experience of young women—you might still plead justification. You say, however, you have known her from her birth: it is of her birth that I am here to make inquiry."

"She is a suppositious child," murmured the poor widow.

"A *what*, ma'am?"

"A suppositious—dear, dear, what am I saying! I mean a posthumous child."

"Just so; her father died before she was born. Still, she must have had a father."

There was a long pause; the widow stared at her companion as a bird awaiting deglutition stares at a snake, but uttered not a syllable.

"I suppose I should not be far wrong," continued the lawyer, blandly, "if I called him Henry Paton."

"Gracious heavens! how did you know that?" exclaimed Mrs. Sotheran, in a terrified whisper.

"I didn't know it till this minute, ma'am. I only guessed as much. She is illegitimate, of course."

The widow nodded sideways, but she meant assent. She was speechless with amazement at the other's sagacity.

"I am distressed to give you pain," said the lawyer, kindly; "but, as I am sure you will understand, I have no choice. There is nothing to be alarmed at—that is, necessarily. It is a delicate case, but all will depend upon the treatment, and it will be in my hands. Only I must know the truth. Now, who was the mother?"

Mrs. Sotheran's tongue seemed to cleave to her jaws; she opened her mouth twice as if for air, and then replied in the same hushed tones, "Jane Lockwood."

"That's bad," said the lawyer, mechanically; the words escaped him before he knew it, or he would have been careful not to add to his companion's apprehension by any dismal forecast of the future. "That was the village organist, was it not, the girl he ran off with?"

"Yes; from Letcombe Hall."

This local touch was full of significance; it was evident that in the widow's eyes it added to the crime of abduction, sacrilege.

"Mr. Paton took it very much to heart, as I have heard."

"He did, indeed; it separated him from his son altogether. It was a terrible time for all of us, and nearly broke Mrs. Paton's heart. She never set eyes upon her Harry again."

"Was Mr. Paton as angry with the girl as with the young man, do you think?" inquired Mr. Rennie, thoughtfully.

"Not at first; at first he pitied her. But when his son refused to marry Miss Campbell of the Towers, which was the only condition upon which he would forgive him—you know the story, of course—he became furious against poor Jane, whose influence, he imagined, was still strong enough to prevent the match."

"And was it so?"

"Heaven knows; the report goes that he soon tired of her, and only refused to obey his father out of obstinacy."

"But what do *you* think?"

"I only saw the poor girl once, when Harry was in America. He may have deserted her (for she had not heard of him for many months), but she did not say so. Indeed, she could scarcely have thought so, since she was so solicitous to obey his injunctions."

"Now tell me: does Mrs. Paton know of all this?"

"She does."

Mr. Rennie's countenance fell.

"How could I help it?" pleaded the widow, pitifully. "Would you have had me keep such a secret to myself? I am not made of stone or steel; and when she was pining

away for her dead son, how could I forbear to tell her he had left a child behind him, her own flesh and blood?"

Mr. Rennie shook his head. What he meant to imply was that it was but a natural child, of which the law (which has but a bowing acquaintance with nature) could take no cognizance.

"Heaven knows," continued Mrs. Sotheran, "that I would have brought up the child as my own had that been possible; but how could I account for its possession, how bring it here, with a daily, nay, hourly, lie on my lips? Instinct would have told the secret."

"Then, on learning the child's parentage," pursued Mr. Rennie, "Mrs. Paton, of course, found the means for her support?"

"She did. How could Mr. Paton himself blame her for that? But she never saw the child, though she yearned to see her. She was content, rather than incur her husband's wrath, to ignore her; content that Mary should grow up an orphan waif, having no other friend than myself. Oh, sir, you are a man, and do not know a mother's heart, or you would pity her."

"I do pity her," returned the lawyer, gravely; "if nothing had happened more than this I could not blame her. But the girl is here, under her grandfather's roof, and without his knowledge."

"I know; I know. Yes, that is terrible. But Mrs. Beckett—there was a quarrel between her and Mary—and the girl was suddenly cast adrift in London, nameless and friendless—no, not friendless, Mr. Rennie, for she has told me how good a friend you yourself have been to her. You will not desert her now: oh, promise me you will not desert her now."

"I am not thinking of *her*," said the lawyer, gravely. "She has friends enough, means enough, and an honest man to love her. I am thinking of Mrs. Paton."

"And I too, Mr. Rennie. Do not think I have forgotten her even for a moment. Her husband will never forgive her—never, never. It will kill her."

"Let us hope it will not be so bad as that. But how could she have done anything so rash, knowing what he is, as to bring the girl here—under his very roof?"

"I have thought of that—nay, I have thought of nothing else from the first hour she came. But having seen her—that was the fatal step—having once seen her, she could not resist it."

The lawyer stroked his chin. He knew that Mrs. Paton had made up her mind to receive Mary as her companion before her interview with her at Mr. Tidman's establishment; but, being a man, he felt it was not worth while to hark back on that. It is only women who cry over spilled milk.

"It is certain that Mr. Paton is very fond of the girl," he observed, meaningly.

"How could he help it?" observed the widow, naively.

"And you are sure Mary knows nothing of her parentage—guesses nothing, and is therefore absolutely ignorant of the deception—for such he will consider it—that has been practised upon him."

"Nothing, nothing."

"Then I will bring them together," exclaimed the lawyer, vehemently, "and tell the whole story before them both."

"Oh, indeed, you must not do that. You do not know Mary Marvon, or how she holds her mother's memory; *that* is sacred to her; but for her father's unknown relatives she feels only loathing and contempt. Directly she found out in what relation they stood to her, she refused to take another farthing from them. That was another reason why Mrs. Paton was compelled to give her a home at Letcombe Dottrell. She was bent on earning her own living rather than receive their alms."

"I remember," said Mr. Rennie, thinking of the typewriter and his copyist: "Mary is a very resolute young woman."

"Resolute! You don't know Mary Marvon. She will tell Mr. Paton to his face that his son was a scoundrel."

"Quite right," said Mr. Rennie, rubbing his hands. "I think I see my way. She couldn't do better. It will only be a corroboration of his own view."

"But she will spare nobody, not even Mr. Paton himself. She will tell him, 'Your wife has done all she could—because all she dared—to repair the sin of her son, but you—you have done nothing.'"

"But how could he, when he *knew* nothing?" said Mr. Rennie, smiling. "A young lady may be resolute, surely, without being unreasonable. At all events, I'll try it. At the worst," muttered the lawyer to himself, "it can but cost me a client."

CHAPTER XLIX.

A DISCOVERY.

MR. RENNIE had his hand on the door, when he suddenly recollected something.

"By-the-bye, you used a phrase a few minutes ago, Mrs. Sotheran, which I should like to have explained. It may be of no consequence, but in a matter of this kind one should not leave a stone unturned. You said—and the remark showed your knowledge of human nature—that Jane Lockwood could hardly have imagined herself deserted by Henry Paton, or she would not have been so solicitous to obey his injunctions. Now what were those injunctions?"

"I—they—I cannot tell you," gasped the widow; "I have told enough."

"Pardon me, my dear madam; but you, whose feelings are so manifestly interested in the matter, can hardly be the best judge of that."

"She was on her death-bed when she spoke to me, Mr. Rennie. If you had but seen her, and heard how solemnly she addressed me, in the presence only of her unconscious child!"

"I wish I had," said the lawyer, gravely; "for then it would have been unnecessary to have put you to this pain. It is, remember, for the child's sake that I plead."

"Would you have me break my promise to the dead?" exclaimed the widow, clasping her trembling hands. "She may be looking on us even now!"

The lawyer crossed his legs and put his finger-tips together—his attitude when instructing counsel.

"My dear Mrs. Sotheran, this matter has been fully

argued, fought out, and settled. It is the case of the pious founder. He was generally anything but pious; a scoundrel who, having lived disreputably, sought, by a posthumous liberality which cost him nothing, to atone for his past misdeeds. But let us take the strongest case, and suppose him pious. Upon his death-bed (a very bad place, by the way, to arrange plans for the benefit of posterity) he made certain arrangements for the public good. Twenty years afterwards (as in the present case), or two hundred years—it doesn't matter—the circumstances with which he made these plans entirely alter; what he intended to be a benefit becomes a nuisance to everybody, and the law very properly steps in and makes them of no effect. No doubt Jane Lockwood meant to do her best for her little daughter, but how could she know that the girl would be one day under Beryl Paton's roof, and engaged to be married to your son? You say that she may be looking on us even now. She possibly may: that is a question which not even the Court of Chancery has the power to settle. But even supposing she is a spectator, she is not a witness of whom we can make much. She is unable to inform us of her present wishes. We may take it for granted, however, that they are in favor of her child—that she desires us to do all we can to insure her happiness. If what she said to you has no tendency to do so, there will be no harm done; what you tell me will then go in at one ear and out at the other. I have too much to do to interest myself, unless in the way of business, in the affairs of any young woman, alive or dead. If, on the other hand, what you have to say is of importance to Mary Marvon, you may do her a very grievous wrong by concealing it."

It was Mr. Rennie's way to take a practical and commonplace view of most things—in which he now and then made a great mistake—but as it happened, he could not, under the circumstances, have adopted a more judicious line with his present companion. His coolness, his confidence, and his total want of sympathy with the morbid excitement under which she labored, tended to steady her nerves.

"After all," she answered, "what poor Jane Lockwood

said to me was very little. But she left behind her a sacred charge. It was a desk, given her, no doubt, by the man who wronged her, while she still believed in him, and in her eyes of priceless value."

"Nevertheless it was not, I conclude, an empty desk," observed the lawyer, dryly.

"I don't know; that is, of course, I never opened it, Mr. Rennie," pleaded the widow vehemently, like one who is making his last stand against overwhelming odds; "I not only gave my word to that dying woman, but took Heaven to witness that that desk should never be given up, save to Henry Paton."

"A dead man at the time you made the promise, madam."

"No matter; I cannot commit perjury."

"Still, unless you burn the desk and its contents, which would be a very strong measure, when you are dead and gone some one will open it."

"After my death you shall burn it," said Mrs. Sotheran, with the air of one who bestows a favor.

"You are very good; but that is a treat which must needs be reserved for your executor. Is it possible, my dear madam, you do not perceive that Jane Lockwood laid this injunction upon you under the impression that her lover was alive; but that, being dead, you are placed in the position of his representative? In not opening that desk, Mrs. Sotheran, you have neglected a sacred duty for the last twenty years."

"Heaven forgive me!" ejaculated the poor lady. "I never thought of that;" and she burst into tears.

"It is a sin of omission, my dear madam," said the lawyer, soothingly, "which, considering the amount of active misdoing we commit, is not worth crying about. It is, as it were, but a portion of that peck of dirt which we are all said to eat in our lives without knowing it. Such an error would be serious, however, if, being convinced of it, we did not make haste to repair it. I conclude you have got the key as well as the desk."

"I have worn it round my neck for twenty years," replied the poor lady.

"Dear me, that is being a trustee with a vengeance!"

exclaimed the lawyer, admiringly. "I should clank like a ghost if I took such care of my clients' property as all that. The desk, I suppose, you hardly— Ah, in the sitting-room up-stairs, is it? I will not trouble you to fetch it; we will go together."

After such work to catch his fish, the lawyer was much too wise to let it out of his sight. He had seen too many, apparently well landed on the bank, disappear with a flap of their tails into the river. From a cupboard in the little drawing-room, in which no one could think of looking for anything of importance, Mrs. Sotheran produced the desk, and gave the key to her companion.

"I have your permission, I conclude, to open it," said Mr. Rennie, with professional caution.

"I have nothing to say to it, one way or the other," replied the poor lady, wringing her hands. Her superstitious fears, aroused by the sight of the desk, seemed to have once more gained possession of her. "The matter is now in your hands, and I will have nothing to do with it."

"Very good," returned the lawyer, not displeased with an arrangement which gave him liberty of action, untrammelled by illogical scruples; "henceforth I will take the whole responsibility of it, and reserve to myself the right of communicating to you my discoveries, or withholding them."

In the desk there was but one piece of folded paper, which the lawyer opened, glanced at, and then quietly placed in his pocket-book.

Mrs. Sotheran watched him with half-averted eyes, as nervous folks look at a precipice. But when he began, "It's only a memorandum, which may or may not be of importance," she thrust her fingers into her ears.

"I don't want to hear anything about it at all," she exclaimed, with vehemence.

"All right, madam, you sha'n't," bawled the lawyer. Then, dropping his voice, he added, "You are sure that it was in respect to that slip of paper that Jane Lockwood enjoined secrecy?"

"I am quite sure."

"She gave you the idea, I suppose, of a very self-sacrificing woman?" said Mr. Rennie, thoughtfully.

"Yes, indeed; she loved not wisely, but too well. She always seemed to me the gentlest of created beings, and, even to the last, had not one word to say against the man that wronged her."

"That was so, was it?" said the lawyer, gravely.

"And what are you going to do about it all, Mr. Rennie?" inquired the widow, anxiously, as her companion rose from his chair. "How grave you look! Surely things are no worse than they were five minutes ago?"

"I don't know; I can't tell," said the other, evasively. "Let it suffice you to learn that what I have found is of importance, and ought to be known; and that to have concealed it would have been to wrong the dead and the living."

"Thank Heaven for that, and you for your good advice!" exclaimed the widow, fervently; "I feel as if a mountain had been removed from me."

As Mr. Rennie moved down the hill towards the Hall you would have said that the mountain had been shifted to his own shoulders. His steps were slow, his brow was heavy with thought, and his lips moved uneasily. "If the man were like anybody else," they murmured, "we should have victory all along the line. But as it is, no one can tell how he'll take it."

CHAPTER L.

AN EXPLOSION.

THE party were all at luncheon when Mr. Rennie reached the Hall, and as he was far too wise a man to suffer the cares of business to interfere with the pleasures of appetite, he joined them. As he took his usual seat by Mr. Paton's side the latter flashed an inquiring glance at him, which also—such is the perfection of the human heliograph—included Mary Marvon. "Sans peur et sans reproche," whispered the lawyer. "I would have laid my life on it," answered the old man, and his eye rested on the unconscious lovers at the other end of the table with

a well-satisfied look. He had had so many disappointments in his *protégés* that a little triumph where his good opinion had been justified was excusable. He regarded his wife also with an unusual tenderness, born of the consciousness that he had gone near to wrong her in his thoughts—so sensitive, so sympathetic is the philanthropist at large, when the bark of his benevolence has a fair wind with her, and there are no chopping seas to obstruct her course. Never had the host's manner been more genial, never had his smile "warmed the cockles of the heart" of every member of the Happy Family, save two, more than upon this occasion. It was true that his eye avoided those of the two philosophers, who shuddered like Lascars in the snow in consequence; but when they were not looking at him, it regarded them with a glance that was by no means devoid of humor. When the meal was at an end he beckoned the butler; "Barkham," he said, "bring me a Bradshaw." Then, after consulting it carefully through his gold spectacles, he observed, with great distinctness,

"Mr. Marks and Mr. Nayler, your train, I perceive, starts at 4.30. A carriage will be at the door for you at 3.20 precisely."

The nature of this intimation, so delicately conveyed, was understood only by those to whom it was addressed. To them, if it had been an imperial ukase dated from St. Petersburg, it could not have signified more plainly that they were banished to Siberia—the Siberia of personal expenses, and landladies with lodging accounts. They knew they were expelled from Eden, and had incurred the curse of labor—that they were about to exchange a land flowing with milk and honey for a barren soil. You may tickle the public with philosophy for many a year before it laughs with a harvest.

The offenders, however, took their punishment with great dignity. One might have said (if one had not known them) that nothing became their life at Letcombe Hall so much as their manner of leaving it. They only bowed and smiled, as though their carriage had been bespoken for them for an excursion of pleasure—just as a Japanese noble, on receiving the imperial commands to make him-

self scarce, proceeds cheerfully to disembowel himself with one of the two swords he always carries about with him. It was not, however, their respective systems of philosophy which enabled them thus gallantly to meet the hour of trial. They had beheld other members of the Happy Family banished from their patron's presence—and come back again like the sun in April. His favor was capricious, and they by no means gave up hope of once more basking in his smile. I am sorry to say that their gentle confederate, Scarsdale, who had received a similar intimation through the mouth of the valet, received her sentence with less resignation. Perhaps she took shorter views, and was of a less sanguine temperament; but the manner in which she “went on” in the servants' hall, and in the presence of the gentleman she had understood (but this, it now appeared, was a mistake) had been betrothed to her, was quite appalling,

Mr. Ralph Dornay's man, who had seen something of town life, afterwards described the scene to his master as reminding him of what happens in a police court when some too excitable lady, on receiving sentence, takes off her shoe, and, with a few appropriate words, hurls it at the administrator of justice. It would have been impossible to imagine, had she not mentioned him very pointedly by name, that Miss Scarsdale's language could have been applied to a person of such respectability and position as Mr Beryl Paton. She was extradited in a vehicle by herself, to the great relief of her fellow-culprits, in whom the apprehensions of her company had, not without reason, greatly increased the terrors of exile.

At the conclusion of the mid-day meal Mr. Rennie accompanied Mr. Paton to his sanctum. The lawyer wore a cheerful countenance, but beneath it there lay as much solicitude as a man of business can afford to feel in the affairs of others. His client, on the other hand, was in high spirits.

“So there was no great mystery about the young lady, after all?” were his first words.

“I didn't say there was no mystery, Mr. Paton; I only implied, as we both expected, that there was nothing to be ashamed of.”

"There *is* a secret then, is there? Well, I'll answer for it you have ferreted it out."

"I have," answered the lawyer, gravely. "The question is, however, since Miss Marvon is ignorant of her parentage, whether more 'people than necessary should know it. Will it not suffice you, Mr. Paton, to have my word for it, that your proposed bounty will not be ill-disposed? Why seek to look into a matter past and gone, the revelation of which can only give pain to an innocent girl?"

"If you can give me the assurance that the matter does not concern me," replied the old man; then suddenly, breaking off with a fierce, imperious look, he added, sharply, "But I know it *does* concern me. What is it?"

"That it has some 'connection' with you, Mr. Paton, I cannot deny; though, when I call to mind your views, so often expressed upon a certain subject, I can hardly say 'concern.'"

Mr. Paton started to his feet as though he had been five-and-twenty, and in a voice shrill with hate and rage exclaimed, "She is that fellow's daughter who called himself my son."

"She *is* your son's daughter," answered the lawyer, quietly; "but, remember, she does not know it."

"That is a lie," exclaimed the old man, passionately; "she is a treacherous, lying girl. It is a conspiracy: who is her confederate? Do you hear me?"

"It seems to me, Mr. Paton," said the lawyer, meeting the other's furious look full-face, "that you have not heard me. Since the girl is unaware of the circumstances of her birth, how can she have a confederate? If, however, you wish to know who was my informant in this matter, it was Mrs. Sotheran."

"Ay, I thought so," cried the old man, striking his hand upon the table. "She sent for her son here to marry *my* son's bastard."

"Permit me to observe that you sent for him yourself," observed Mr. Rennie, dryly. "I have your letter, in which you say as much. You even write in it that his coming will be a pleasant surprise for Mrs. Sotheran."

How, therefore, could she have foreseen what was to happen here?"

"It never will happen," said Beryl Paton, grimly. Then, after a long pause, "Who was her mother?"

"Jane Lockwood."

Beryl Paton uttered a frightful imprecation. "So her brat has been palmed off upon me, has she, to be the prop of my old age and the comfort of my declining years! A little too soon, however, as she shall find. Yes, I see it all now; the woman Sotheran was always hand-in-glove with the girl till she disgraced herself and fled from this roof. She was sent for when the girl died, and brought back a lying tale of the child being dead, too; it is a plot that has been twenty years maturing, and promised a fair harvest, but the crop has failed. As for her accomplice, Miss Marvon—"

"She is no accomplice," said Mr. Rennie, firmly.

"Tool or accomplice, it is all one," cried the old man, vehemently. "So help me Heaven, I will never see her base-born face again."

It needed Heaven, it seemed, or some power beyond his own, to help him in this resolve, for his face worked and his eyes softened as he uttered it. "If the fraud had lasted longer," he continued, bitterly, "I should have wasted more than what she sought upon her, for I had almost learned to love her."

"As to seeing Miss Marvon's face again," said Mr. Rennie, gravely, "you may do that and yet not break your oath, for she is not base-born."

"What?"

"Listen; and then be deaf to the voice of nature, if you please. When Jane Lockwood lay a-dying, with her child beside her in its cradle, she did the noblest thing that ever woman did. Your son had left her, and had long been dead, but she thought him living. He had laid his commands upon her to keep a certain document—I have it here—secret from every eye except his own. She knew what it was, and that the production of it would clear her fair name from stain. Yet sooner than disobey him, and by this disclosure destroy perhaps the last hope of reconciliation with yourself, she died, in Mrs. Sotheran's pres-

ence, patiently enduring her pity, if not contempt, and consenting to be thought to be your son's mistress, when she was his lawful wife. This is the certificate of his marriage."

A wolfish light came into the old man's eyes as he murmured, "Give it me."

"No, I will not give it to you, Mr. Paton, till I learn what you intend to do with it."

"To tear it—to burn it!" cried the other, in a voice half-choked with passion. "Bid the girl leave this house at once; not a moment longer shall it shelter one of that serpent's brood."

"She is your son's lawful daughter, sir; your own grandchild," said the lawyer, quietly.

"I believe it; that is why I hate her," shrieked the old man. "Frail as her mother, false as her father, bid her go, I tell you, or I will push her forth with my own hands;" and as he spoke he made a stride towards the door.

"Stay, sir, stay!" exclaimed the lawyer, with dignity. "If you are indeed resolved upon this most unnatural and unjust proceeding, let it at least be put into effect with decency."

"Do as you will, but bid her begone, spawn of an ingrate, her and her lover too, and may my curse go with them!" The vehemence and rage of the old man's tone were terrible, but not worse than the expression of his face, which seemed to blaze with hate and fury. The lawyer regarded him with a steadfast look.

"If I thought you were master of yourself, Mr. Paton," he said, "I would say to you a word or two of truth, though they should be the last I ever spoke to you. But as it is, I will but do your bidding; not that it is my office, nor that of any man who respects himself, to carry out such infamous injunctions, but because in my mouth they will be less offensive to those who must needs obey them than in yours."

CHAPTER LI.

LAWYER AND CLIENT.

MR. RENNIE, who knew his client and his ungovernable passions well, felt that there was no time to be lost in performing his unpleasant mission to the young people. It was a wet day, and it was their custom of an afternoon, as he remembered, to pass their time in such weather in the library. Mary was fond of reading, and whatever volume chanced to be engaging her attention had a marvellous attraction for Charley. A duplicate would not serve his turn. She complained—though not bitterly—that she could never get a book to herself, nor even look at an illustration without his shadow crossing it.

“One lesson from one book they read.”

They were reading it when the lawyer entered; that is to say, Mary was reading it, and Charley, sitting on the arm of her chair, was reading Mary; studying her downcast eyes and would-be serious mouth, and steadying himself for the task (for how can a young man use application unless he is steady) with his hand upon her shoulder—“a sight to make an old man young.”

“Mary,” said the lawyer, gravely, “I have bad news for you—bad news for you both.”

“Good heavens! what has happened?” exclaimed Charley.

“A great deal; far more than I can tell you in the time at my disposal. Mr. Paton has just discovered that his son contracted marriage with the young lady with whom, as you have doubtless heard, he fled from this very roof some twenty years ago.”

“How can that be bad news?” inquired Charley. “Mr. Paton must surely be glad to find that his unhappy son was not so black as he has been painted.”

The lawyer shook his head. “In marrying Jane Lock-

wood he filled, in his father's eyes, the cup of his filial disobedience; in the keeping that marriage secret, he has crowned a life of duplicity and deceit. Such, at least, is the view which I conclude Mr. Paton has taken of it, for he is almost out of his mind with hate and rage."

"But are they not both dead?" murmured Mary, in a horrified whisper. "In such a case one forgives even a murderer."

"Yes, my dear girl, they are dead; but I know, by sad experience, that where kin hates kin, the tomb itself is no asylum. I am bound to say," continued the lawyer, not forgetful, even in that moment of keenest exasperation, that the offender was his client, "that if Henry Paton could have had his will, he would have doomed his father to a more dreadful fate than death."

"And was he as bad a husband as a son?" inquired Mary, with a half-incredulous glance at her lover's face, as if in the vain attempt to picture him with a fault or two.

"I cannot tell. He had a wife, I know, whose self-sacrifice would have made her worthy of the best of husbands—a loving, patient woman, in whom duty survived death itself."

"And could not her love plead for her husband with his father?" said Mary, softly.

"No. When nature fails in us, my dear young lady, good itself works for evil. It was that very love which he could forgive in her least of all."

"And yet Mr. Paton has been so good to us!" sighed Mary. "It seems impossible to believe such things of him. Oh, Mr. Rennie, can all this be true?"

"It is quite true, and there is more and worse behind," answered the lawyer, gravely. "Mr. Paton has heard for the first time to-day that this unhappy pair left offspring: an orphan daughter still survives them."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Mary, fervently; "in her he can retrieve the past."

"Quite right," said Charley, cheerfully. "I see what your bad news amounts to now. The heir is found: the Happy Family breaks up like the Round Table, and all have once more to seek their fortunes. I have found

mine," he added, gently, stooping to kiss Mary's forehead; "and if we have to wait a little longer for our happiness, and, when it does come, to live upon bread and cheese instead of kickshaws provided by a rich man's bounty, what matters? I thank him all the same, since it was through him I won her; nor do I grudge this new-found Miss Kilmansegg her acres or her guineas."

The lawyer glanced at the young man approvingly. "If I had a daughter of my own," he thought, "this is the sort of young fellow—if he could only make a decent settlement—that I should choose for a son-in-law." "No, my good lad," he said, "this orphan will prove no heiress, and robs you in another way. Her grandfather has closed his heart against her, and spurns her from his roof. Mary Paton, for such indeed you are, my dear young lady," and the lawyer laid his hand upon her head with great solemnity, "I am here, though very unwillingly, to bid you leave it."

"It's a strange story!" exclaimed Charley in amazement, not unmixed with some incredulity, for in his experience in the Probate Office he had known mistakes to be made even by lawyers; but Mary, who knew Mr. Rennie better, burst into tears.

"There is nothing to regret, my dear," said the latter, gently. "Remember how long it is since both your parents left all trouble and sorrow behind them."

To this word of comfort, which doubtless owed its suggestion to the statute of limitations, Mary replied by a grateful look; but what she was thanking him for in her heart of hearts was the way in which he had spoken of her mother. How reverently, too, had Mrs. Sotheran always done so; but not, she remembered with a pang, not Mrs. Paton. Of the memory of her son, indeed, that lady had shown herself mindful enough, but of the girl whom, as she believed, that son had betrayed, she had spoken nothing. She had good reasons, as we know, for never mentioning Jane Lockwood's name, but poor Mary did not know them. She naturally imagined that she ignored her. Mrs. Paton had endeared herself to the girl in a thousand ways, and Mary loved her; but at this moment, when she seemed to have just found her mother,

she felt averse from all who had turned a cold shoulder on her.

"I am ready to leave this house at once," she answered, calmly. "Mrs. Sotheran, I know, will take me in."

"Quite right—a capital plan," exclaimed the lawyer; "take her up to your mother's house, Charley, where she can await events. There is no knowing how things may turn out here in a day or two, though they look uncommonly black at present. Let her put on her bonnet and be off at once, lad," he added, earnestly, as Mary, with a whispered word to her lover, was about to leave the room. "If her grandfather sets eyes on her there will be a scene that they may both repent, for the girl does not want for spirit."

"She wishes, however, to see her grandmother before she goes," said Charley; "it is but for a kiss of farewell."

"A dangerous thing at all times," returned the lawyer, grimly, "but in this case midsummer madness. Such an interview is not to be thought of. If Beryl Paton, whose head is already full of jealousy and mistrust, should find her speaking with his wife, he would suspect some new conspiracy. Be off—be off with you both."

After having seen the young people safely upon their way, with a facetious promise, intended to sustain their spirits, that their personal luggage should be respected and sent after them, even if he should find himself unable to protect their interests, the lawyer returned to his client, whose state of mind he had by no means exaggerated. The half-hour of solitude which Mr. Paton had passed during the other's absence so far, indeed, from having allayed his excitement, seemed to have increased it.

"Is she gone?" he exclaimed, with vehemence. "Has the seed of that viper left the house?"

"If you mean your granddaughter," said the lawyer, dryly, "that young lady has gone to Bank Cottage." He purposely stated the place where she had taken refuge, lest the knowledge that she had quitted Letcombe Dot-trell should tend to familiarize the sense of estrangement, and thereby make any act of harshness that he might have in his mind more easy for him. In the tumult of his hate and passions, however, this hint escaped the old

man's notice. "And her lover?" he continued, in a shrill, chill tone—"the boy that, under the guise of frankness, has been plotting to feather his nest both for him and her—has the boy gone too?"

"Charles Sotheran is also no longer a burden on your hospitality, sir."

"So far so good. Not a moment shall be lost in making sure that neither of them shall reap any benefit from me in any other manner. Bring me my will."

"Which will?" inquired the lawyer, grimly; "there are half a dozen of them, none of which, for some inscrutable reason, you have allowed me to destroy."

"I have kept them, Mr. Rennie, as mementos of the baseness of mankind, and as guide-stones, such as the coastguard use upon our downs by night, to warn me against the depths of duplicity and ingratitude."

"Let us hope they will keep you on the straight road of common-sense for the future," was the lawyer's quiet reply.

"Bring me my will, I say—the will I signed the other day, before I knew my confidence was being abused, by which I made provision for these insidious harpies. As they have forfeited my bounty while I live, so shall they fail to inherit one farthing of my wealth when I am dead and gone."

"Then may I ask, Mr. Paton, who is to inherit it?"

"The man to whom the half of it is already bequeathed—Edgar Dornay."

"And is it your serious purpose to make that young man, whom you have known but a few weeks, and only as a casual guest, your heir?"

"Why not?" exclaimed the old man, passionately. "He is neither kith nor kin of mine. There is no tie of blood—no blood-poison—between him and me. Why not? I have not known him long, 'tis true; it is my experience that the more one knows of men, the more one regrets the knowledge. Yes, Edgar Dornay shall be my heir; and since he has certain high-flying notions, such as I had myself before I knew the world, and of what stuff my fellow-men were made, which may induce him to share my bounty with certain unworthy persons, I will thank

you to so contrive it as to put such misplaced generosity out of his power."

"I will draw up no such will," said Mr. Rennie, firmly.

"You will not! How dare you say so?" cried the old man, imperiously. "Is not my wealth my own, to leave to whom I like?"

"Rather say, Mr. Paton, to keep from those you hate: nay—for you have not even the excuse of personal antagonism—to keep from the innocent offspring of one you hate."

"My money is my own," answered the old man, coldly.

"No doubt; yet hear me, Beryl Paton. Whatever your faults, you have never been ungenerous or ungrateful; and since, just now, it is vain to expect you to listen to reason, I appeal to you to hold your hand in this miserable business, as a friend to whom you owe something, and, for one thing, your present liberty; the power not only to perform what you have in your mind, but the simplest actions—to breathe the free air of heaven, for example. But for me you would be now in a mad-house."

"I know it," answered the old man, sternly. "And who would have placed me there? My own, my only son. If there had been a chance of my being moved to weakness in this matter, if some fond memory of that viper, when in his childhood, and before he had begun to waste his life, had stirred within me, and pleaded for his child, that hint of yours would have crushed it. I thank you for the reminder, Mr. Rennie. You have been my friend, I acknowledge it fully. If I have not given you material proofs of the gratitude I owe you, that is not my fault. You could have had them if you pleased, and you can have them still. But please to remember that, while you are my friend, you are also my lawyer."

"I say again, Mr. Paton, that I will draw up no such will."

"Then you have lost a client. This very hour I will send to Lorton for Macalister, and he shall have my instructions."

"Do so!" exclaimed the lawyer, laying his hand upon the door, and flashing upon the other a parting glance of hostility and contempt. "Do so; and when that will is

drawn, and you are dead, and powerless to commit more injustice, I'll drive a coach-and-four through it!"

CHAPTER LII.

SEVERED.

AT Bank Cottage the exiled pair were welcomed with fear and trembling. With pale and terrified face the widow listened to her son's explanation of what had taken place at the Hall, and even while clasping Mary to her breast regretted her presence.

Her first words when he had finished were, "And what of Mrs. Paton?"

"Mary wished to see her," said Charley, "but Mr. Rennie would not hear of it. He said that if Mr. Paton found them together, even though taking farewell, he would suspect they were in league against him."

"And so he would," murmured the widow. "Has not Mr. Paton seen her since all this happened?"

"Seen Mary?"

"No, no; his wife. Hark! what is that?" There was a sound of galloping hoofs in the lane beneath, and Mr. Flay flashed by on his pony at full speed. The kindly little doctor did not so much as raise his hat as he passed by them; he looked like one who rides for life and death.

"There must be something the matter at the Hall," said Charley, apprehensively.

"God help poor Rachel!" muttered the widow, devoutly. That she called Mrs. Paton by her Christian name was itself significant of her fears.

"If anything has happened to—to grandmamma," said Mary, earnestly, "I *must* go to her."

"Not for worlds!" exclaimed Mrs. Sotheran; "you can do no good, my darling, and may do a world of harm."

"But she has been so good and dear to me," sobbed Mary, breaking down for the first time; "and am I not her own flesh and blood?"

"That is a plea that will serve you little, my darling,

save with her own sweet self. If, as I fear, your grandfather's wrath is roused against her, the sight of you would only add fuel to its flame. I knew it would one day come to this," murmured the widow to herself; "how could you, could you, be so rash, Rachel?"

The three stood at the open window in silence, looking down the beautiful valley, steeped in the calm of evening and the freshness of the spring. But their eyes were fixed only on that spot where the towers of the Hall were visible. The air was full of quiet country sounds, but their ears listened only for some hoof-tread or footfall which should herald a messenger from the great house.

Nevertheless, to one of them, for years to come, that landscape, with its pleasant fields and farms, was to recur again and again in every detail of sight and sound—the cow that stood by the gap and chewed the cud; the milkmaid, as unconscious of domestic catastrophe as her patient charge; nay, the very creak of the unseen cart-wheel in the road.

After a weary hour of suspense and strained attention the news came. The doctor's pony once more appeared over the brow of the hill. As it drew slowly near, as though there was no need for its rider to hurry now, he made with head and hand a melancholy gesture. All seemed to know the burden of his tale before he told it, and listened with bowed head. "It is the last chapter of the old story," said Mr. Flay, addressing the widow; "I always told you how it would end."

Mrs. Sotheran hid her face and burst into tears. Not so did Mary.

"There must have been some cause," she said, mechanically putting aside Charley's encircling arm as though it was no time for softness, and speaking with earnest gravity; "even women do not die of nothing."

"Poor Mrs. Paton died of heart complaint, of which she had suffered for years," replied the doctor, looking curiously at his interlocutor; "there was some shock, no doubt."

"Was my—was her husband with her when she died?" inquired Mary.

"Not at the moment—no; just before, as I understand."

"I thought so." The accusation and conviction in her tone were terrible.

"Mary, Mary! say no more," whispered Charley, imploringly. "What good can come of saying, even if it be so?"

His argument, it is probable, prevailed less with her than the sense of obedience one day to be owed to him; but she held her peace. Of the fact, however—which was only too true—she felt persuaded, namely, that Beryl Paton's anger had killed his wife. He had spoken daggers, but used none.

It would have been a satisfaction to the believers in heredity, because a corroboration of their theory, to see the set, determined look that took the place of Mary Paton's smile as she uttered those three words, "I thought so." What she was saying to herself was what she afterwards repeated to Lady Orr, who called at Bank Cottage, full of sympathy for Mary, immediately after the catastrophe, and on the eve of her immediate departure from the Hall, "Well for him that he has disowned me, for never will I own him for kin of mine!"

Then, with all the woman once more in her face, she turned to the weeping widow, and mingling her tears with hers, sobbed out, "*You* are my mother now; the only one near and dear to me in all the world!"

"Save Charley, my own darling," answered Mrs. Sotheran, soothingly.

"There is no need to remind her of that, mother," said Charley, gently, "for Mary and I are one."

What Charley thus stated, somewhat in advance of the fact, was less so than he imagined, for it is certain that in that hour of sorrow it never struck him that Mrs. Paton's death, by giving him the means to marry upon, would accelerate his own happiness.

For many a day, however, Sorrow made her abode with the little household at Bank Cottage. It was dreadful to Mary, and hardly less so to Mrs. Sotheran, to feel that Mrs. Paton lay unburied so near them, and they forbidden to press one kiss of farewell on the cold lips that had so often breathed their names. Even the cross of white flowers they wrought for her coffin-lid was returned to them, by Mr. Paton's orders.

From their windows only did they venture to behold that long procession (albeit it comprised no such true mourners as themselves) wind along the road beneath them to the village churchyard; but Mr. Rennie, who, himself unbidden, found place among the crowd, told them all that passed. Though Beryl Paton stood alone and watched, with tearless eyes, the vault shut in the dead—the faithful woman who loved him to the last, and would have loved him more could he have hated others less—it was the lawyer's conviction that the nerve which sustained the man was strained to the uttermost. "His will is iron," he said, "but his heart is wax. His hand will never clasp mine again; it is his own harsh error that has sundered us. But this I will say for him, that no man has taken more delight in making others happy, has done more good without a thought of self, has striven more to make the rough places smooth for tender feet, than Beryl Paton. Wealth and power have been his ruin; they have made him draw too proud a breath. In the plenitude of his greatness and in the certitude of his own good intentions he has forgotten that, however well one may play the part of Providence to the unthankful and the evil, it is God alone to whom vengeance belongeth. He feels it now, though he will never confess it; and that conviction—I read it in his face as it turned towards home to-day—will be his death-blow."

The lawyer's judgment, even when it had no connection with his calling, was seldom at fault, and soon after Mrs. Paton's funeral Mr. Flay began to make professional visits to the Hall with unwonted frequency. Charley had long returned to town and his office duties, and concerning her grandfather, whether for good or ill, Mary's mouth was sealed. But the widow, who, now that the worst had happened, had lost her nervous fears of the master of the Hall, was very curious to know how things were going on there. The doctor's report of his patient, though given with professional caution, was gloomy enough. He described him as passing entire days without speaking, save by signs to the deaf mute, and, at the best, as being very silent and apathetic. He still, however, took the head of his table, and matters went on much as usual, except that

many things which he had formerly looked after in person were now superintended by Mr. Edgar Dornay. It was understood on all sides that in case of anything happening to the squire that young gentleman would be his heir; but in the meantime the Happy Family were entertained as usual. The two philosophers, forgiven, doubtless, because they had plotted against the object of their patron's enmity, had had their sentence remitted after a few days of banishment, and were again in clover; but Miss Scarsdale, less wise in her generation, and who knew not how to be patient under punishment, was in exile presumably for life.

"And what will become of them all, do you think, Mr. Flay, when Mr. Beryl Paton goes?" inquired Mrs. Sotheran.

"Oh, after him the deluge," said the little doctor, who had no love for those parasites, especially for the philosophic ones. "When the sewers are flushed it is impossible, you know, to tell where the rats go."

Thus life ran its smooth round at Bank Cottage till midsummer came round, with its month of vacation (for a holiday granted to a great man's *protégé* counts for nothing) for Charley.

"I hope, my dear," said Mrs. Sotheran, one day, to Mary, with a little more simplicity, I'm afraid, than naturally belonged to her, "that you will not bring the dear lad all this long way for *nothing*. You see, the fare is of some consequence to a poor government clerk."

Mary strove to look ignorant of the widow's meaning, but her blushes belied her; indeed, considering what the burden of Charley's daily letters had been for some time past, it was difficult to ignore it. She preferred, however, to answer the latter part of Mrs. Sotheran's speech instead of the former.

"I don't see why Charley should consider the fare," she said, evasively. "Mr. Rennie was telling me in his very last letter something about the dividends being due this month that would make him quite a Cæsus."

"Charley's dividends! Why, my dear Mary, do you suppose that Charley would ever take or touch one shilling of *that* money? It must be paid to him, I suppose,

since it was left to him, because poor Rachel dared not leave it to you directly. But if you think that, except as your husband, he will ever reap any benefit from it, you do not know him as his mother does."

"I never heard of such a thing," said Mary. "The idea of his not taking his own money!"

"My dear, it is not his own. As Mr. Rennie will tell you, all these matters depend upon the intentions of the testator, and there is no question in this case about them. Indeed, as poor Charley writes to me, though he is too delicate-minded to urge that plea with you, every day you delay your marriage you are flying in the face of your poor grandmother's wishes."

"But she has been dead such a little while!" sighed Mary.

"If she had had her will, you would have been married while she was yet alive; and I am sure that it would distress her—if a saint in heaven can be touched by trouble—to think that the happiness of her dear ones is being postponed for her sake. It is, at the best, a very conventional view of duty, Mary."

I am afraid these sentiments had not originated in the widow's breast, but had been cunningly suggested to her by another, with the request that she should adopt them as her own.

"Well, if *you* think so, Mrs. Sotheran," admitted Mary, "I am sure it cannot be wrong; and if Charley is so silly as to deny himself, unless I share them, the comforts which I am sure my dear grandmother meant him to enjoy, why—"

"Just so," put in Mrs. Sotheran, her wits sharpened by maternal love; "it would, as you were about to say, be acting very selfishly to Charley, and even a little like the dog in the manger."

So it was not "for nothing" that Charley came down at midsummer; only it was agreed that since, if it happened at Letcombe Dottrell, it would put Mr. Wills, the vicar, in an embarrassing position as regarded his patron, the wedding—in spite of the indignant protest of Lady Orr, who wrote, "If I were in your place, my dear, I would be married under your grandfather's nose"—took

place in London. It was done in the quietest way; but Mr. Rennie, who gave the bride away, took very good care that the world should know all about it. The announcement of the auspicious event not only set forth Mary's parentage in a perspicuous manner, but added (just as though he had had a title, in which case, even if he is but a knight, one's grandfather always puts in an appearance), "and granddaughter of Beryl Paton, of Letcombe Hall." After which assertion of the bride's aristocratic lineage the happy pair went prudently into lodgings.

The money that good Mrs. Paton had left them did not produce "an income to marry upon," in the eyes of fashion, but then Charley and Mary (as I hope we have made sufficiently clear) were not fashionable people. They would have been very happy could they have seen more of one another, but the Probate Office took up most of Charley's day; and though she never told him so, Mary had rather a weary time of it in his absence. There is no place, it is well known, like home, but there is also no place so little like home as London lodgings. Notwithstanding which, there were many palatial residences, and especially a certain one in Park Lane, where there was not one tenth of the wedded happiness enjoyed by this unambitious young couple.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE DISPUTED WILL.

It was Charley's habit at breakfast-time (no doubt engendered by official duties, which comprehend, I have noticed, a good deal of casual newspaper reading) to skim over a penny paper. One morning he found some news in it of more than public interest: it was a long obituary, headed "Death of Mr. Beryl Paton, the philanthropist."

The epithet would have made some men's lips curl had they stood in Charley's place, but he had never nourished a bitter thought against the old man. He had always

discouraged the suggestion that Mr. Paton was behaving in an unnatural manner, and had shown himself to be Mary's enemy. He held that Beryl Paton's case was an exceptional one, where nature had been "expelled with a pitchfork" from what was otherwise a noble heart, and that he was nobody's enemy but his own. It was a subject on which he did not talk much to his wife. He understood that her reverence for her mother's memory, her indignation on her grandmother's account, and the neglect with which she herself had been treated in her youth, caused her to take severer views of her grandfather. But now that the man was beyond man's judgment, he knew her gentle heart would have no room in it for any but charitable thoughts.

"My darling," he said, "your grandfather is dead."

She put down her tea-cup, rose, and, walking to the window, stood there a moment or two looking out into the street, but seeing nothing.

"God help him and forgive us all!" she presently answered.

"Amen!" said Charley. "The poor old fellow was found dead in his bed yesterday morning. The paper says he is to be buried at Lorton."

"In the cathedral?"

"Yes."

"That was not his wish. He enjoined upon me, if he omitted to leave any instructions to that effect, that I was to state that he wished to be buried under Dottrell Knob."

"How strange! The writer of the obituary, however, can, of course, know nothing about such matters yet. He speaks of the cathedral being the proper place for a man of such public mark and usefulness in his locality to lie."

Nothing more was said, and Charley went his way, taking a somewhat graver farewell of his young wife than usual.

His fellow-clerks at the office were full of the news. "The old fellow will not surely carry his resentment beyond the grave, Sotheran," said one. "He will cut you off at worst with twenty thou. or so."

"What a day it will be for you when his will comes in

for proof, my lad!" said another. "You will be the first man I ever knew with a million of money."

These congratulations were not welcome to Charley—not that he felt, or could be expected to feel, much personal regret at what had happened, but they were distasteful to him on his wife's account, into whose mind no thought of material advantage from her grandfather's death had ever entered.

The question "Who will be Beryl Paton's heir?" however, was one that excited much curiosity, and the husband of his only relative was, naturally, a subject for speculation.

On the third day Mr. Rennie looked in upon the young couple with a lugubrious face, which to Mary seemed sufficiently accounted for by the circumstances.

She spoke to him about her grandfather, and, avoiding all unpleasant topics, reminded him of what he had said of him on the occasion of Mrs. Paton's funeral: how that no man had taken more delight in making others happy, or done more good without a thought of self.

"That is quite true," said the lawyer, gravely; "but, when wronged (as though he felt that he of all men least deserved to be so), he resented it with extreme bitterness and obstinacy. I am sorry to say, my dear Mrs. Sotheran, that he nourished that resentment in your case to the last."

"I am sorry, too," she gently said.

What she meant was that she was sorry upon his account, not on her own; but the other mistook her, imagining her quietness of tone to signify resignation to pecuniary loss.

"Just so," he answered; "you are sorry, but not surprised. I confess that I had hoped he would not utterly have forgotten the claims of his own flesh and blood. But I regret to say it is so. I have seen Macalister. There are a great many legacies, but none to those who had most right to expect them. He has made Edgar Dornay his heir."

"He might have made a worse," said Charley, generously.

"And also a better!" sighed the lawyer. "I can only say I did my best for you."

Mary gave him a grateful smile, and Charley wrung his hand.

"That is the only thing we shall think off concerning this matter, Mr. Rennie," he said—"your great kindness. Of disappointment there is nothing, for there was no expectation. You have no idea how happy we are!"

Being a bachelor, it is probable he had not. But "It does not matter now" was what was in the lawyer's thoughts; "but when the children come, and this contented little firm becomes an unlimited company, a few thousands of Beryl Paton's money would come in extremely handy."

Then they fell to talking about the funeral, which Mary thought her husband ought to attend.

"Very good," said Charley. "I am not fond of funerals, but it is to Beryl Paton that I owe you, my darling, and therefore I will go."

"I would not, if I were you," said the lawyer, dryly. "You can do him no good; and as no one believes in gratitude, your presence will only be set down to expectancy."

"That's a very hateful notion," observed Charley.

"Yes, but I have noticed that many people's notions are hateful. If you take my advice, you will make no sign in this matter."

This was agreed to, and then Charley inquired whether Mr. Paton had left any particular orders as to his interment; then, on Mr. Rennie's replying that he had not done so, he told him what the deceased had said to Mary on that subject. The lawyer seemed rather struck with it.

"He wanted to be buried under the Knob, did he? I wish he had left that memorandum behind him."

"But ought not Mary to speak?"

"Certainly not. The motive would be misconstrued."

"Motive? What motive?"

"Good heavens, what a pair of turtle-doves you are! Without the wisdom of the serpent, you might surely have guessed that such a will, made by such a man, is sure to be disputed. Do you suppose Edgar Dornay will become the richest man in England without a fight for it. Beryl Paton has made half a dozen other heirs, to my knowledge. They'll dispute his last testament, of course."

“Upon what ground?”

“Ground? As if we lawyers, like a mere Archimedes, could move nothing without ground! But in this case there are acres of it. Undue influence, madness—the latter especially. That is why you must say nothing about his wanting to be buried under Dottrell Knob—an intention on the part of the testator which certainly points that way. People would say you wanted to prove him mad.”

“And if we did, how could that benefit us?” inquired Charley. “If the last will was shown to be invalid, then the last but one would hold good; would it not?”

“I had forgotten you were in the Probate Office,” said the lawyer, dryly. “Still, I advise you to say nothing about the Knob.”

At the end of the week came the funeral—an affair of great pomp and magnificence. It was a dull time in the journalistic world, and therefore the papers were full of it. Reporters described the scene, and delicately implied that they were personally moved by it: “Who could hear that noble anthem, ‘When the ear heard Him then it blessed Him,’ peal over the remains of such a man without?” etc. It really was, however, an affecting scene. There were more genuine tears at Beryl Paton’s grave than were ever shed over that of prince or warrior. Men were there whom he had raised up from death—the death of indigence and despair—to a life of honesty and content; women whom he had saved from worse temptations; orphans to whom he had been a generous father. There was scarcely any class of his fellow-creatures which did not comprise a witness to his virtues. It was stated that Mr. Edgar Dornay, the heir to the deceased’s great estates, and whose skill and taste had so long been known in artistic circles, was designing a magnificent monument to his memory, which would be intrusted to the most eminent of modern sculptors. “But,” added the composer of the paragraph, with less of originality than truth, “Beryl Paton needs no monument; his work survives him, and testifies to his worth.”

Then when Eulogy, which has a short breath, was exhausted, Slander took up the tale. Mr. Beryl Paton had done some liberal things, no doubt, but the catalogue of

his vice was endless, and also very curious. He had himself dragged iniquity with a cart-ropo, but in his son's case would not pardon a peccadillo. Public sympathy for his granddaughter took the more agreeable, because the more exciting, shape of indignation against the stranger he had made his heir. Mary Sotheran, as we know, was excluded, by a special clause, from deriving any possible benefit from her grandfather's will. If Edgar Dornay should attempt to right matters ever so slightly, he lost all. But the world at large knew nothing of that, or credited nothing, and the sensitive Edgar was the mark for ten thousand stings. The golden salve of a million of money could not cure them. And he had not got the money. The will gave it to him, but, as Mr. Rennie had predicted, more than one person—"parties"—disputed the will.

This is not the place to describe the great Beryl Paton will case, the *cause célèbre* of the Court of Probate. It was said of the deceased, as can be said of few rich men, that in his lifetime he had neither been ostentatious nor litigious, had not done much for either the newspapers or the lawyers; but he made it up to them after his demise. The details of the trial took the place of the proceedings in Parliament, which, fortunately (for the journals), was not sitting; and the gentlemen of the long robe settled down upon his remains—that is, upon what he had left behind him—like crows upon an elm-top. He had, it seemed, instructed Mr. Macalister to destroy his fine collection of wills, with two exceptions: the one, of course, under which Mr. Edgar Dornay claimed to succeed to the property, and a previous one, executed but a few months before, by which Messrs. Marks and Nayler came in for a considerable cantle. The view of these philosophers, supported by an enterprising firm of solicitors who took up their case from motives of benevolence, because they thought it a very good one, was, first, that Mr. Edgar Dornay had exercised undue influence over the deceased, especially in the few weeks preceding his death, when, indeed, he had been paramount at the Hall; and, secondly, that Mr. Beryl Paton had, before executing his last testament, become *non compos mentis*. He had certainly

done some very curious things: gone to church, for example, on a week day, when there was no service, and after passing a couple of hours in his pew alone, expressed himself as more gratified with his experience there than he had ever been in his life; he had gravely suggested that Dr. Bilde should write "An Autobiography of a Vivisectionist" for the *Animal World*, the organ of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; and he had made proposals in writing for the bringing-out of one Japhet Marcom, a deaf mute, as a public singer.

These facts were dilated upon by no less than five counsel, and denied, upon Mr. Edgar Dornay's behalf, by five others, instructed by Mr. Macalister. They were not true, they argued; and if they were true, so far from being symptomatic of alienation of mind, argued a high degree of intelligence. As to that solitary church-going, was not no sermon (to the ear of criticism) often to be preferred even to a short one? As to the *Animal World*, was not the narrative of a life steeped in crime often found to be more deterrent than goody-goody anecdotes were found conducive to good conduct? As to the suggestion of bringing out the deaf mute at Covent Garden, had not a street organ without a barrel turned out a great success within the memory of an intelligent jury? Or, taking another view, was it not certain that three fourths of the people who went to the Opera in reality were bored with the singing? and what was more natural than to suppose that Beryl Paton, whose lifelong object had been to promote the happiness of the greatest number, should have had this also in view in his last testament?

What the advocates on Mr. Edgar Dornay's side, however, most dwelt upon, was the eccentricity of conduct which had marked the whole course of the deceased's existence.

"Good heavens!" said the leading counsel, with emotion; "why, who ever heard out of a story-book of any other man going about doing good on the same extensive scale without taking indirect but efficient measures to have it properly reported in the public press? Of what other man in a like position was it recorded that, with his enormous local influence, he had never exerted it for his

own benefit, but had plodded on (if we might use the expression) on his £50,000 a year, without asking the government for so much as a baronetcy? What other man had exercised patronage and munificence on such a scale, and never looked for his *quid pro quo* in the way of flattery, or even subservience? Why, all this is so contrary to human experience, I had almost said, gentlemen of the jury, to human nature, that it might well have aroused the suspicion—if the case were another man's—of his having been stark staring mad! Yet who of all the subjects of his benevolence, and doubtless often undeserved benevolence, has ever suggested that Mr. Beryl Paton was out of his mind? It is true, his son made such an allegation—that son, of whom, remembering the beautiful injunction of the Latin poet, 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum,' I will say nothing—but why did he do it? For the same reason that the suggestion is made now, in order to gratify his greed at the expense of justice. If eccentricity is madness, then, indeed, my client is in evil case, but in no worse case than our opponents. Witnesses will be produced before you who will testify to many acts, anterior to the will of the 10th of September last, on which my learned friends on the other side have taken their stand, fully as unusual and eccentric, but doubtless quite as easy of explanation, as those committed during the last months or weeks of the deceased's existence."

Whereupon Mr. Reuben Burzon was produced, with such an unvarnished tale of Mr. Beryl Paton's *protégés*—acrobats, wild-beast tamers, and repentant thieves—as made the hair of all the jury save one (who had none) fairly stand on end with astonishment; also a South American gentleman (imported at an immense expense) whom the late Mr. Beryl Paton had thrown into a dock and left to drown because he had been a friend of his late son's; also certain waiters who had seen the deceased dining alone at a table laid for fourteen persons, and heard him returning thanks for his health being drunk by nobody in a most appropriate speech.

To read all this for many, many weeks was very painful to poor Mary, though at the same time it afforded her some comfort; for, as Charley observed with characteris-

tic naturalness, "If your grandfather was so queer as this, my dear, in his ordinary relations in life, what wonder is it that he was queer to his blood relations? If I was you, I wouldn't think anything more about it—I wouldn't, really. It is clear to me that he was touched in his head, and I only hope" (here he kissed her, and winked with a significant slyness which brought the color to her cheeks) "that that sort of thing is not going to be hereditary."

Mr. Rennie also read the case with mingled feelings. It was wormwood to him that Mr. Macalister should have the conduct of it, but very pleasant to reflect that he was not doing it well. It was the lawyer's private opinion that Mr. Edgar Dornay's counsel were overdoing the eccentricity argument, and getting on rather dangerous ground for all parties.

The sympathies of the young couple could hardly be said to be enlisted on either side, though they would have certainly preferred to see Edgar Dornay victorious than the two philosophers; and when the evidence was over they probably took less interest in the decision than many persons who were wholly unconnected with the matter.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE VERDICT.

It was December, and Mrs. Sotheran had been persuaded with little difficulty to come up from Letcombe Dottrell to pass Christmas with her young people. The emptiness of the great house made the neighborhood dull, and the lonely widow more *triste* than ever; and the thought of returning home when the Hall should have found an owner was very disagreeable to her, since in no case would she have a friend in her neighbor. Though she had never had very cheerful matters to discourse about with Mrs. Paton, she missed her companionship very much. There was even some talk of Mrs. Sotheran coming to live with the young couple, which, however, that lady, who was as wise in some matters as she was simple

in others, was loath to do. On the other hand, a partnership of income would enable her son to take some modest home of his own a little way out of London, which, in view of a certain contingency—the arrival of a little stranger—would be more convenient than the living in lodgings. They were discussing the pros and cons of this project after dinner, when they heard the visitors' bell ring; the wheels of his chariot they had not heard, for there was a deep snow on the ground, and when he entered he was hardly recognizable by reason of his cloaks and "wraps." As no one, however, took such care of himself (externally) as Mr. Rennie, they identified him at once.

"Oh, this *is* good of you," said Mary. "Why, I thought you said the other day you had to go into the country, and would not be able to see us again till the New Year?"

"Well, yes; but the fact is, something has occurred to defer my visit, and I thought I'd just look in to—to wish you a Merry Christmas."

He filled his glass, and at his request they all did the like. It was no conventional "compliment of the season" (a phrase I detest above all others), but an interchange of the heartiest good wishes.

It would have been difficult to find four people so very different in character who respected one another more.

"By-the-bye, I've got a bit of news for you; the verdict's out."

"They've been time enough about it," observed Charley, composedly. "The jury were left deliberating at twelve o'clock."

"Well, you see, it was a big case; your friends the philosophers have lost it."

"I am deuced glad of it," said Charley, frankly.

"I am afraid they cannot afford to lose it," murmured Mary, pityingly. "Will not the expenses be very heavy?"

"The costs are to be paid out of the estate."

"Come, that's very satisfactory; I may now confess," said Mary, "that I am glad Mr. Dornay has beaten them."

"Naturally; he is an old friend," said the lawyer, winking, with an unexampled slyness, at Charley. "Still, if the others had won, they might have given the 'rightful heir' a *douceur* of £10,000 or so in the way of com-

compensation, whereas Dornay is bound by the will from doing so. It was only the other day that you were saying to me, Charley, how very handy £10,000 would come in."

"I never spoke so disrespectfully of any such sum," said Charley, laughing, but with the color in his cheeks, and a little displeased that his wife should hear of a wish that might suggest discontent in him. "I said that £10,000 seemed to me just the perfection of a fortune, and that as to anything more, I should not know what to do with it."

"Then if you were left with a million of money, what would you do with the nine hundred and ninety thousand pounds?"

"But, you see, I have not been left it."

"No, but your wife has been!"

It was not Mr. Rennie's way to joke upon business matters, but for the moment they all thought him influenced by the associations of the season—that he was slightly pantomimic. There was a pause, and three forced smiles.

"I am incorrect in saying that Mrs. Charles Sotheran has been left this great fortune," continued the lawyer, gravely, "except so far as the law can be said to leave it. That fellow Macalister (the solicitor ignored the five counsel) has been 'hoist with his own petard.' The jury have decided that Mr. Beryl Paton was not in a condition to manage his own affairs or dispose of his property anterior to the 18th of September last, whereby both his last testaments are rendered null and void. The whole property, consequently, reverts to Mr. Paton's next of kin. He used to say that the proverb, 'Blood is thicker than water,' was all rubbish; but in the eye of the law, I am glad to say, the old saw holds good. Riches are deceitful, but still I must needs congratulate you, Mrs. Charles Sotheran, on being one of the wealthiest women in England."

It would be a proof of imagination in a man of letters, indeed, if he could conceive the feeling of an individual who unexpectedly finds himself possessed of a million of money. I can assert with confidence, however, that Mary Sotheran was more astonished than gratified. A sense of responsibility hung like a great cloud over the brilliant future thus presented to her, and dulled its brightness; its

contrast with her past was too tremendous. She was overwhelmed with the burden to which she had not been born.

"It is like a terrible fairy tale," she murmured; "I cannot grasp it as a reality."

"Well, I suppose we shall not now live in lodgings, *that's* certain," observed Charley, with the air of a man who has found firm ground, if there was but a foot of it.

"Heaven have mercy on us!" ejaculated the poor little widow. "Heaven have mercy on us!" at intervals, like minute-guns. She was so accustomed to calamities that this amazing prosperity had for her something of the nature of a final catastrophe.

In a month's time, however, they were all living at Letcombe Hall, a "happy family" of a very different kind from that which had formerly inhabited it. Charley threw up his clerkship in the Probate Office without a struggle; but it was averred by his former superiors (after his elevation) that they had never known a young official of such promise, and that the country had sustained a severe loss in his retirement from the public service.

If I forget to mention any one of those persons who had shown kindness to Mary Marvon in her need, we may be sure that Mrs. Charles Sotheran did not forget them. The whole of the old household at the Hall, except the valet (who received the pension his late master had intended for him), were retained; and if Japhet Marcom did not sing for joy, it was for a reason with which we are acquainted. He had good cause to do so.

Every intention of the deceased with respect to legacies was carried out to the letter. Even the two philosophers, though Mary had small cause to "remember" them in the *douceur* sense, were not forgotten; nor did Dr. Bilde lose his stipulated honorarium for professional attendance on his late patron, though the codicil that had given it to him was, of course, waste paper like the rest. The whole Happy Family were, in short, made, at least, as happy as they deserved to be. Mr. Rennie thought his client's conduct very Quixotic, but then, "What else was to be expected in a descendant of Beryl Paton's?"

This liberality was, nevertheless, in some cases very far from giving satisfaction to its recipients. Mr. Marks pub-

lished a pamphlet, "The Beggar on Horseback Riding Sideways," designed to lampoon his benefactress; but, unable to eliminate from the composition the "categories" and the "noumenons," only about half a dozen folks understood what he was driving at; and, being themselves metaphysicians, they were unable to explain it to other people.

Mr. Nayler, whose circle of flesh-and-blood acquaintances had become, since his patron's death, extremely limited, confined himself to observing, with much bitterness, that he could hardly have imagined any one so utterly false and hollow as Mrs. Charles Sotheran, even if it had fallen to his lot to *make* a presentment—a remark which the public (who conceived his head to have been turned by the late trial) imagined to be a reference to some grand jury.

One of the first persons to whom Mary's thoughts reverted, so soon as she found herself endowed, as by a fairy wand, with the power of doing good, was Mr. Tidman. That worthy man is now the proprietor of one of the finest hotels on the south coast, that locality having been chosen on account of the supposed delicacy of his lady, who is more ethereal than ever, and occupies the best apartments on the first floor, as though she were a guest, and had even less to do with the management of the establishment than she really has. This improvement of position only recalls more vividly the memory of better days, and the associations in connection with the late Sir Anthony Blenkinsop, Baronet, of the Manor, Slopton, over which she still sheds copious tears. Her husband superintends all matters of importance with great diligence and sagacity, and only regrets he has no time for everything. When he has half an hour of leisure he locks himself in his private parlor, and it is whispered (though he takes the precaution to put paper in the keyhole) gives himself up to details—takes off his coat, and with the old superfluous energy transforms the table into a mirror.

Miss Julia Blithers, although in no need of pecuniary assistance, sent her warmest congratulations to Mary upon her good-fortune. "My book," she wrote, in the highest spirits, "is coming out at last. You will gather from this

fact that poor dear Sarah is dead. I understand that you are acquainted with Mr. Dornay, the poet. If you can get me his autograph you will be conferring on me a great obligation ; but if not, I dare say I can procure it"—which I have no sort of doubt she did.

Edgar, deprived of his million, has taken quite a high place among our Bards of Despondency, and drawn tears from a thousand eyes ; or, to speak less vaguely (for his public is limited), from two hundred and fifty pairs of them.

Mr. Ralph Dornay has not, I regret to say, turned out altogether as we could have wished, but his wife finds him less unendurable ; the fact is, they are separated. He has been induced, thanks to Mr. Rennie's good offices, to retire from Park Lane upon a very handsome pension.

Lady Orr once remarked, in speaking of him to Mary, "Your grandfather, my dear, used to say that there was nothing so disagreeable to extricate one's self from as the tie of blood ; but there he made a great mistake—there's matrimony."

Notwithstanding which assertion of her ladyship, Mr. Rennie maintains that if anything should happen to Ralph Dornay he should not be the least surprised to receive his widow's instructions for another "settlement." "One talks of a 'marrying man,'" he says, "but after an experience or two *he* learns to know better ; a marrying woman nothing can cure."

After a silence of a quarter of a century the great walled garden at Letcombe Hall echoes once more to children's laughter. If Mrs. Paton, from her abode in heaven, is permitted to listen to it, it is a music, we may be sure, that will not mar for her the angel choir ; nor will it now jar upon her husband's ear, who, as I trust, is now inhabiting the same mansion in the skies. We vanish away, it is true, like a breath, but on the glass of memory some linger a little longer than others. Of all the persons described in this little life drama, Beryl Paton will live longest in human remembrance, and, in my poor judgment, with all his faults, will deserve to live.

THE END.


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